A

PREFACE

TO

A Collection of CONFESSIONS, &c.

Publiſhed at Edinburgh in 1719.

By WILLIAM DUNLOP, A. M. Regius Profeſſor of Divinity and Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory in the Univerſity of Edinburgh.

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PROPOSALS for printing, by Subſcription,

LETTERS and JOURNALS, written by the deceaſed Mr ROBERT BAILLIE, Principal of the Univerſity of Glaſgow.

To which is prefixed, Some account of the Author's life; taken from the archives of the church of Scotland.

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A

FULL ACCOUNT

OF

The ſeveral Ends and Uſes of CONFESSIONS OF FAITH,

The Juſt Foundations of their Authority as a Public Standard of ORTHODOXY,

AND

A Vindication of the Equity, Uſefulneſs, and Excellency, of ſuch Compoſures.

Written by the Reverend WILLIAM DUNLOP, A. M. Regius Profeſſor of Divinity and Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory in the Univerſity of Edinburgh, deceaſed.

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A FULL ACCOUNT OF The ſeveral Ends and Uſes of CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

AT a time when Creeds and Confeſſions of Faith are ſo generally decried, and not only expoſed to contempt, as uſeleſs inventions, without any force and efficacy to promote the intereſts of truth and religion; but are loaded, by many writers of diſtinguiſhed wit and learning, with the moſt fatal and dangerous conſequences; and repreſented as one of the moſt plentiful ſources of thoſe angry debates, and fierce contentions, which have for ſo many ages diſtracted the Chriſtian church; we thought it might be of ſome uſe, and a ſuitable enough Preface to a new edition of the Confeſſions of Faith, &c. embraced by this church, to give a ſhort account of the end and deſign of compoſures of this nature, and of the chief purpoſes which the Chriſtian churches intended to promote in framing and publiſhing their ſeveral Confeſſions: and it is hoped theſe will be found to be ſo conſiderable for their number and value, as to convince the impartial reader, that there is no occaſion for treating them with diſdain or neglect; and that we are juſtly to be excuſed, who retain a veneration and eſteem

of them, as works both founded on reaſon, and ſupported by many advantageous conſequences.

And ſince creeds in general are not only of late years undervalued as mean and uſeleſs, but exclaimed againſt as unjuſt, arbitrary, and inconſiſtent in their frame and tendency with the liberty of mankind, and the noble freedom of the Chriſtian faith, we ſhall endeavour to vindicate the preſent practice of the church of Scotland, and the uſe which ſhe at leaſt makes of her Confeſſion; wipe off the aſperſions which have been thrown on her by writers, who, how juſtly ſoever valued on many accounts, yet appear not ſo thoroughly acquainted with our conſtitution, or perhaps not altogether impartial in their ſentiments of it; and, laſtly, we ſhall anſwer ſome of the moſt plauſible objections which have been made againſt the uſing Confeſſions as a means of preſerving the Chriſtian doctrine from impure mixtures, and of preventing the breaking in of hereſies and diſorder into the church. After all which, it will be eaſier to determine, if they ought to be accounted arbitrary impoſitions, and deſtructive engines of ſpiritual tyranny, and the luſt of power, over the conſciences of men; or if they be not rather very conſiſtent with all the privileges and freedoms of a man, or a Chriſtian.

The ſeveral purpoſes which the churches deſigned to promote by their Confeſſions, may be reduced to theſe three.

1. Some of them were of a very general and extenſive deſign; having a regard, not only to the whole body of Chriſtians, but to all men, even their enemies, who had any knowledge of them.

2. Other uſes of theſe Confeſſions peculiarly reſpected the miniſters of the goſpel, who were obliged to declare their aſſent to the doctrines contained in them.

3. Con-

3. Confeſſions of Faith were alſo deſigned for purpoſes of a more extenſive nature than the ſecond, and yet not ſo general as the firſt claſs; namely, ſuch as reſpected the whole body of the people, as well as the miniſters; but were particularly calculated for the members of that church to which the Confeſſion belonged, and had a ſpecial regard to them, more than to the whole world, or to other Chriſtians who were members of other churches.

In examining a little theſe things, we ſhall have occaſion to conſider all that is proper to be obſerved in a work of this nature.

PART I.

Containing thoſe purpoſes of Confeſſions which were of the moſt general and extenſive nature, and had a regard, not only to the members of the particular churches which framed them, but to the whole world.

FIRST, Some ends of Creeds and Confeſſions were of a general and extenſive nature; being intended to reach, not only the whole Chriſtian church, but to make an impreſſion on the world round about it, which maintained a different religion. —— And of this ſort there were ſeveral conſiderable deſigns in view.

I. THAT which ſeems to have been moſt directly intended by the ſeveral churches who have framed Confeſſions, was, to publiſh a fair and authentic account of the doctrine which they maintained, whereby a juſt idea of their religion might be given to the world, who ſo frequently miſtake or miſrepreſent the opinions of one another.

ther, and the aſperſions and calumnies that were thrown upon it by adverſaries might be wiped off. This was one main end of the Creeds compoſed by the primitive church, and by our fathers at the Reformation; and it is a purpoſe that our Confeſſion is very neceſſary to.

There are too frequent occaſions to obſerve, that all ſects and parties are biaſſed by undue prejudices againſt one another. Self-love, which is ſo deeply interwoven with our natures in this degenerate ſtate of things, and ſhows its power in the whole train of our thoughts and actions, inſenſibly determines us to entertain a fond opinion of any ſcheme or party which we are engaged in, and to look at it in a flattering, though it ſhould be a falſe light; and at the ſame time to take up miſtaken notions of our adverſaries, impute abſurd opinions to them which they never entertained, and paint the errors they may have been really led aſtray by to the diſadvantage, and more crooked and deformed than the life. And as this inhuman and uncharitable treatment of one another is owing rather to the temper of our minds, than any particular principles of the doctrine which we embrace, it may be equally charged upon perſons of every ſide, who have not learned to ſubdue their own ſpirit, nor endeavoured to govern their paſſions by reaſon, and ſweetened their tempers by humility, and meekneſs, and charity; virtues which have become as admirable for their rareneſs, as for their excellency.

It is this which, amongſt the numberleſs crowd of authors, makes it ſo very difficult to find one that does juſtice to an adverſary, or treats his perſon with gentleneſs, or even good manners, and his opinions with an open and candid impartiality; and thoſe who have been at all acquainted with controverſy,

controverſy, will find it the hardeſt thing for two warm diſputants, when ſtruggling hard for victory, not to throw about that dirt, whereby, if they cannot overthrow, they are ſure to blacken and beſpatter each other.

But as truth of every kind hath moſt reaſon to complain of this inhuman uſage, the Chriſtian religion, during its tender years, was in a peculiar meaſure expoſed to all its fury and barbarity. Its bleſſed author was aſſaulted, both by the tongues and the hands of his implacable enemies: they reviled him by calumny, while they perſecuted him by force; and when they crucified and tormented his body, they inſulted him with the moſt bitter reproaches, and endeavoured to blacken his memory and doctrine by the falſeſt aſperſions. Thus the apoſtles and primitive Chriſtians were expoſed to contempt, as the offſcourings of all things; and to popular hatred and anger, as movers of ſedition, and enemies to the public peace: beſides all which, their religion, as well as their perſons, was in like manner defamed.

The doctrines and precepts of the holy Jeſus were founded on ſo many convincing reaſons, and ſupported by ſuch amazing miracles; they were ſo admirably ſuited to the dignity of the human nature, the peace and happineſs of mankind, and to all the great intereſts and the moſt enlarged deſires of an immortal ſpirit, and at the ſame time in every reſpect worthy of the ſupreme being; that they could ſcarce have miſſed to make their way into the eſteem and love of mankind, and be profeſſed at least, if not practiſed, by the world, if they had been fairly repreſented, and ſet in a juſt light. There needed nothing to gain this end but what the Apologiſt mentions, *Unum geſſit ne ignorata damnetur.* Chriſtianity deſires no favour of its judges, but that they be careful to underſtand

ſtand it. Upon this account, amongſt all the arts of hell, none ſeemed more effectual to ſtop its progreſs, or maintain the kingdom of darkneſs, and the idolatry of the blinded nations, than falſehood and miſrepreſentation; by which not only the glory of Chriſtianity might be obſcured, and men kept from ſeeing the beauties and excellencies of that religion in their native light and purity, but it would likewiſe be expoſed to public view, diſguiſed with a falſe face, which was rendered as deformed and monſtrous as calumny and reproach could make it; that ſo the world might be determined in their opinion thereof, not by what it was really in itſelf, but by the quite contrary idea, that the lying malice of hell, and the impetuous paſſions of its votaries, gave of the doctrine and diſciples of the Meſſiah. So that the leaſt acquaintance with the hiſtory of the church will convince us, that though the power of the Roman empire, the learning and ſophiſtry of philoſophers, and the perſuaſive allurements of wit and eloquence, were all employed in fighting with the greateſt fury againſt the kingdom of our Meſſiah; yet calumny was ſtill the moſt ſucceſsful engine uſed by the devil in this infernal war. From this quarter the moſt violent aſſaults were made; and the father of lies was the character he acted under with the greateſt malice and dexterity, and whereby he gave force and vigour to his other inſtruments. It is indeed ſurpriſing to think, how far he prevailed, and what notions the people generally were impreſſed with. They not only deſpiſed the profeſſors of Chriſtianity as mean and ignorant; perſecuted them as enemies to the laws, and diſturbers of order and government; but fancied them to be the moſt impious and flagitious ſect that had ever appeared in the world, without the leaſt remains of honour and virtue: no crime ſo black, but it

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was charged on them; nor any luſts and pleaſures ſo unnatural and filthy, but they were thought guilty of them. Their aſſemblies for divine worſhip were traduced as rendezvouſes of villany and debauchery; and the celebration of the holy ſacrament itſelf was held forth as a more horrid and frightful ceremony than any of the myſteries of Bacchus or Venus, and as a rite deſigned to initiate men into the diſſolute practice of every impurity and abomination. And all this was repreſented as the tendency and deſign of their religion, as we are at large informed by the writers of the firſt ages; and particularly by that beautiful and elegant work of Minutius Fœlix, the admirable Octavius, where theſe diabolical calumnies are fully explained and refuted. So that, conſidering the ſcandalous notion the people had got of Chriſtians, it was not ſo much the thing as the name which they perſecuted. When their character was ſo blackened and defaced, no wonder that it became odious and contemptible; and when they were clothed with the ſkin of a ravenous tyger, the devil eaſily prevailed on the blinded world to rid themſelves of them; and *Chriſtianos ad leones* was the natural conſequence of the idea which had been received of them.

In ſuch circumſtances, it was neceſſary, to the honour of their religion, and that juſtice which every man owes to his good name, for the Chriſtians to give a fair repreſentation of the nature and tendency of that religion which they had made choice of; whereby the falſehood of all thoſe helliſh calumnies would become evident; and the world muſt be convinced, that a religion calculated to promote virtue and purity, and advance the glory and happineſs of our natures, to reconcile men to God, and unite their minds by the moſt diſintereſted love, and extenſive charity, could ne-

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ver give the ſmalleſt countenance to any of thoſe abominations which were charged upon its profeſſors. And this was the more neceſſary, becauſe thoſe odious colours which had been put upon Chriſtianity, appeared the more plauſible from the conduct of the Gnoſtics, and the other monſters which infeſted thoſe times; who, though they ſcarce retained one principle of our religion, and had formed the moſt impious and abſurd ſchemes of doctrine, which were in all reſpects contradictory to it; yet they uſurped the name of Chriſtians; and the Heathens, who knew little more of it but the name, confounded all together who bore it, and attributed to the whole the exceſſes of debauch and impurity which they ſaw theſe heretics abandon themſelves to. It was therefore of the laſt conſequence to the church, to diſtinguiſh betwixt the Gnoſtics and themſelves; and ſhow, that their principles and practice had nothing common with thoſe filthy brutiſh ſects.

It was for this purpoſe, then, amongſt others, that Creeds and Confeſſions were at the beginning framed, which gave a ſhort ſummary of the principal articles of the Chriſtian faith, and afforded every perſon the eaſieſt acceſs to form ſome notion of a Chriſtian: and, it is hoped, in ſo far they ſprung, neither from luſt of power and ſpiritual pride, nor from a tyrannical dominion uſurped over the conſciences of men, (which have been given out in this age as their only riſe), but that their original was both juſt and neceſſary. It was for the ſame purpoſe that Juſtin Martyr, Tertullian, &c. publiſhed their Apologies for Chriſtianity; which in ſo far were of the ſame nature and tendency with Confeſſions; though the condition of the church at that time made it impracticable to frame ſuch large accounts of their faith by common conſent.

At the Reformation from the apoſtaſy of the Antichriſtian church, the Papiſts uſed the ſame engines to obſcure the light of the goſpel, and put a ſtop to its progreſs, as the Heathens had done formerly; the ſame irreconcilable enmity to the glory of the Meſſiah's kingdom equally animating them both, and inſpiring them with rage and falſehood. As the Pagans dealt by the Chriſtians, ſo did they by the Reformers; abuſed their perſons, and traduced the doctrines which they taught; and not content to aſſault them with argument and violence, they defamed them by noiſy calumnies: and however unjuſt and abominable any imputation was, they never ſcrupled to charge it upon them, if thereby they could either incite the wrath of thoſe in power, or ſtir up the furious zeal of the unthinking populace againſt them. Hence all the meaſures taken by our heroic forefathers, who threw off the Romiſh yoke, were repreſented as proceeding wholly from a contempt of all authority, and a diſregard of the laws and orders, either of church or ſtate, and from a fond inclination to novelty, and to a diſſolute life, that ſhould have nothing to curb its extravagancies. They were exclaimed againſt as the perſons who turned the world upſide down.

There was ſo much care taken to ſpread theſe falſehoods, and the matter was of ſo great importance, that it ſeems to have been the chief deſign of the ſeveral Confeſſions compoſed by the Reformed churches to provide a remedy againſt this evil; which they endeavoured to do, by publiſhing to the world a plain and genuine account of the doctrines which they maintained, and of the ſprings whence the Reformation flowed, and of the purpoſes it aimed at, that it might appear they were entirely different from the invidious repreſentation their adverſaries made of them, and that

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ſuch were extremely impoſed upon who credited their ſlanders.

For this end, as the prefaces to many of the Proteſtant Confeſſions inform us, they deſigned thoſe compoſures, that the Emperor, and other princes under whom they lived, might diſcover how little ground there was for perſecuting them as diſturbers of the public peace, and enemies to magiſtracy; when, in the ſtrongeſt manner, they taught its divine original, and its abſolute neceſſity to the happineſs, or even being, of any ſociety: and though they expoſed the tyranny of the Papacy, and ſtrove to beget in their people ſuch a value for the liberties of a Chriſtian, as might make them abhor that unſufferable bondage which the Roman Pontiff had enſlaved the world into, they at the ſame time recommended obedience to thoſe powers which are ordained of God, and embraced no principle that had the ſmalleſt tendency to licence and diſorder.

They intended to ſhow by their Confeſſions, that when they diſclaimed the authority of the Antichriſtian church, undervalued its cenſures, and ſtood unſhaken by the thunders of the Vatican, they were not moved by a hatred to diſcipline, a ſpirit of ſedition, nor a love of unreſtrained pleaſures; but by a juſt regard to the honour of God, and the genuine deſigns of eccleſiaſtical government; and by a noble abhorrence of an uſurpation upon the dominion of Chriſt in his own kingdom, and the liberties of his ſubjects; and, in a word, that it might become evident, that the corruptions of Popery were grown to ſuch an exorbitant height, and had ſo univerſally polluted the doctrine and worſhip of that church, that the grounds of their ſeparation from that communion were of the utmoſt importance, and

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laid them under an abſolute neceſſity openly to renounce it.

One thing alſo was directly aimed at by our fathers, that the world might ſee how different their doctrine was from the dreams and ravings of the Anabaptiſts, and other monſtrous heretics, who acted ſo extravagant a part in Germany about the time of the Reformation.

We have ſpoken at greater length upon this end, which both the primitive Chriſtians and the Reformed churches propoſed in framing of their creeds, becauſe it is of very conſiderable importance with reſpect to the doctrine of our church, and one thing that, it is hoped, may be gained by a tolerable acquaintance with our Confeſſion. Never was there a church whoſe principles were more unjuſtly miſrepreſented, and loaded with calumnies more diſtinguiſhed for their blackneſs and their variety; and conſequently this uſe of a Confeſſion, whereby a genuine account may be given of what we maintain, is become of the greateſt neceſſity to us: for beſides thoſe ſlanders and reproaches which we ſhare with all the Proteſtant churches from our common enemies, there are many peculiar circumſtances with relation to the ſtate of religious matters in Britain, which gave riſe to diviſions of ſeveral kinds, put an edge upon the ſpirits of parties violently animated againſt one another, and occaſioned the more calumnious miſrepreſentations of perſons and doctrines.

Every body knows in what unhappy diſtracted times the Weſtminſter Aſſembly met, and compoſed that Confeſſion of Faith, which hath ſince been received and owned by the church of Scotland, as containing the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of Chriſtianity. The flames of a civil war raged at that time through the whole nation, and there were few breaſts which had not been heated

heated and diſordered thereby. Contention, revenge, hatred, and the other angry uncharitable paſſions, had with moſt people got the maſtery over the ſweeter and gentler fruits of the Chriſtian life, and univerſally prevailed. When things had come to ſo melancholy an extremity, that the ſword was unſheathed, and the contending parties not only diſputed, but fought, there was little place, amidſt the noiſe of arms, and the horrors of blood and violence, for meekneſs, love, a forbearance of one another, and a charitable conſtruction of opinions and actions; nor were temper and moderation almoſt any where to be met with; the whole body was in a fever, and the fermented humours broke over all the bounds of reaſon and conſideration, and the fierceneſs and rage of their battles mixed with and invenomed their diſputes; and it may be without difficulty believed, that angry men would readily be tempted to blacken and calumniate the opinions of thoſe whom they ſtrove to deſtroy, and give the moſt odious colours to their doctrines, that might conduce to vilify and expoſe their perſons.

Upon the one hand, ſuch as were remarkably zealous for the Proteſtant cauſe, and the liberties of the people, were animated, by their affection to their country, and apprehenſions of its danger, with the greater warmth againſt thoſe who they thought betrayed it, or maintained principles that ſeemed to look towards Popery and arbitrary power, and made them both think and ſpeak things of them that were perhaps carried too far, and more harſh and rigid than was reaſonable; while, on the other ſide, uncharitable paſſions boiled over with no leſs violence. The pernicious deſigns of ſome who favoured Popery and tyranny enraged them againſt the moſt active and ſteady oppoſers thereof; and the clergy of the church of

England, whoſe power and dignities were very much lowered upon the prevailing of the parliament, and many of whom were turned out of their livings, were no doubt extremely diſguſted, and moved with reſentment, againſt ſuch as they fancied the authors of their misfortunes, and got their ſpirits gradually ſoured by the uſage they met with. This naturally made them entertain the worſe opinion of every thing that came from the ſide of the parliament; and, amongſt others, the Preſbyterians, who had generally gone that way, had a large ſhare of their unfavourable thoughts: ſo that, beſide the queſtions immediately in debate, the doctrines which they embraced, and the Confeſſion of Faith framed by the Weſtminſter Aſſembly, upon that very account that they were theirs, became odious. The blackeſt and moſt injurious notions thereof were indulged, and the contrary principles eagerly received and propagated.

When public affairs were in ſo diſordered a condition, the government, both of church and ſtate, fluctuating and unſtable, and the various humours and paſſions of men in a preternatural heat, there aroſe a great number of different ſects and parties. Giddy, deſigning, or ambitious perſons, would fix upon nothing, but ſet up for authors of new ſchemes, run down the old principles of religion, and dreamed fancies of their own; which they then freely propagated; and found too many weak and unſettled enough to follow ſuch blind and perverſe leaders, as *Quakers*, *Antinomians*, *Fifth-monarchy-men*, *Muggletonians*, &c. whoſe names were as harſh and barbarous, as their doctrines were deſtructive of all government, and contradictory to the plaineſt rudiments of religion.

Now though theſe ſects were indeed as different

from the fathers of our church as they were from the Epiſcopal party, and purſued them with an equal hatred; yet becauſe at the beginning all of them joined in maintaining the public liberties, and oppoſing the meaſures of the King, which appeared arbitrary, and inconſiſtent with the juſt privileges of parliament, their adverſaries jumbled and confounded them all together; and while they conſidered them as one party, whatever extravagancy was advanced by any viſionary ſect, was without ſcruple charged upon the whole, and improved to render all equally odious and deſpicable, under the common denomination of *Fanatics*; though, with not much more reaſon, than if all the abſurdities of Popery ſhould be charged upon the Engliſh, becauſe Britain and Spain were once confederated to bring down the exorbitant power of France; and with the ſame juſtice that ſo oppoſite things as Rome and Geneva have been often of late joined together by ſome paſſionate ignorant writers.

One thing alſo contributed not a little to the unworthy ſentiments entertained of our fathers, that there was no care taken to diſtinguiſh betwixt the beginning, progreſs, and end of the civil wars, nor betwixt the perſons who acted, and the ſprings of management during thoſe different periods, though they were not only diſtinct, but frequently contrary to one another. The parliament, and their adherents through the nation, were impreſſed, by a train of unhappy events, with a deep conviction, that in order to preſerve the ſinking ſtate, and the decaying intereſts of the Reformation from utter ruin, it was abſolutely neceſſary to make a vigorous reſiſtance to the imperious deſigns of the court, which had of a long time been fondly graſping at a tyrannical domination, and to put a ſtop to the innovating principles and bold attempts

attempts of ſome high-church prelates, which ſeemed to lead us back again to Rome, and ſap the foundations of the Proteſtant faith.

As this was the riſe of the civil war, it is certain, that many were engaged in it who propoſed only to maintain liberty, and give a due life and vigour to the laws; to reform abuſes, remove Papiſts, and evil counſellors; and to eſtabliſh things on ſuch a firm and ſtable bottom, that the power of the King might not be dangerous and fatal to the conſtitution: but never had it in their thoughts to overturn the government, or introduce diſorder and licence: and of this ſort were moſt, or rather all the Preſbyterians.

During the progreſs of the war, perſons of quite different complexions prevailed; men of levelling principles grew bold and numerous; the ſectaries got into the army, and gathering ſtrength, entirely diſpoſſeſſed the parliament of their authority, brought the King to the ſcaffold, and, together with Epiſcopacy, overturned all government in the church, being as great enemies to Preſbytery as to the Hierarchy. Notwithſtanding whereof, by a very unaccountable turn of thought, the different perſons who begun, carried on, and concluded that war, were conſidered as one body, moved by the ſame ſpirit, and acting on the ſame principles; and the extravagancies of any one ſect were imputed to all the reſt, though in their views, principles, and management, they were as diſtinct from one another as from thoſe who aſſumed to themſelves the name of *Royaliſts*.

Such was the ſtate of things, and ſuch the temper of men, at the Reſtoration; when the biſhops and clergy, who had been fretted and irritated, did not recover their temper and charity with their preferments, but remained too much under the power of wrath, revenge, and hatred, to any who,

during the former troubles, had oppoſed them. The Preſbyterians, who were the moſt powerful party of the Diſſenters, were principally aimed at, and calumny became one of the engines of perſecution, which was indefatigably wrought upon; though we ſhall do them the juſtice to own, that many of them might really have perſuaded themſelves of the truth of thoſe black repreſentations which they laboured to infuſe into others. For, as we have mentioned, they had accuſtomed their minds to think the ſame way of all who could not comply with the eſtabliſhment. So that all the diſtractions of the late times, and the monſtrous opinions of ſects which then ſprung up or grew to a height, were charged on the Preſbyterians. Their doctrines and principles were declared to be of the ſame ſtamp and tendency with their alledged practice; they were wreſted and perverted; the moſt foreign inferences were drawn from them, and the moſt falſe imputations made; and whatever an ignorant or angry diſputer pleaſed to fancy of them, and afterwards confidently affirm, was believed to be their genuine doctrine by the unthinking multitude.

And as the ſame fierceneſs, heat, and uncharitableneſs, have continued to embitter and enrage many even till our times, the ſame methods of falſehood and calumny are ſtill followed, and the preſent church of Scotland uſed in the ſame manner with our fathers, loaded with all the former reproaches, and blackened by each of thoſe falſe and abſurd imputations: ſo that our doctrines and principles are extremely miſtaken, both by thoſe who differ from us in our own country, and by the members of our neighbouring church, who give frequently repreſentations of them very different from what we are conſcious they really are. So that, were a ſtranger to judge of our conſtitution

conſtitution and doctrine from the notions of them ſpread through the writings of that ſide, he muſt form a very falſe and injurious idea of both; nor could we blame him for contemning and abhorring ſuch a party as it is given out we are.

Were our principles only blackened with the moſt malicious ſlanders by ſuch as openly favour Popery, and ſhow an inclination to make too great advances to Rome; or by men of haughty and paſſionate minds, who are impatient of the leaſt contradiction, and have accuſtomed themſelves to put the harſheſt conſtruction on things, and treat every body that is ſo preſumptuous as to differ from them with rudeneſs and ill language; we ſhould have rather pitied them than retaliated injuries, and endeavoured to bear it with patience, and an eaſineſs of mind; knowing that truth and charity muſt be always expoſed to ſuch uſage from thoſe of their adverſaries in whom heat and darkneſs are the governing powers, and that a wiſe man will ever lay his account to meet with it, while there are ſo many who "whet their tongues "like a ſword, and bend their bows to ſhoot "their arrows, even bitter words, that they may "ſhoot in ſecret at the perfect."

We ſhould have alſo with as much indifference and calmneſs neglected the ſcurrilous abuſive invectives which writers of a meaner rank abound with, or the railing of common pamphleteers, who write to vent their gall and ill-nature, or to gratify the bigotry and rancour of others; ſince theſe are not to be reaſoned with, and what they ſay will ſeldom make a diſadvantageous impreſſion upon any that are tolerably endowed with humanity and underſtanding.

But what affects us more ſenſibly, and ſeems to be in a peculiar degree the misfortune of our church, is, that many of better ſenſe and temper

have taken up with the ſame falſe notions of it, and act according to the prejudices which have been inſtilled into them; and it were eaſy to inſtance ſeveral late writers of our neighbouring church, diſtinguiſhed for their learning and moderation, and beyond the leaſt ſuſpicion of favouring Popery or tyranny, who yet ſeem to have entertained very miſtaken ideas of our doctrine and government, to have looked at them in a wrong light, and taken up too much of the unfair colours under which enemies repreſent them.

All theſe make us regard our Confeſſion of Faith as of more than uſual importance with reſpect to this firſt end, which moved churches to compoſe and publiſh creeds, the clearing their principles, &c. from calumnies and miſtakes. As our fathers therefore did at the Reformation, we alſo beg now ſo evident and eaſy a piece of juſtice, that the world would form their ſentiments of our doctrine and government upon that plain and open account given of them by ourſelves, in the Confeſſion of Faith embraced by the church of Scotland, the Directory, Books of Diſcipline, and others of public authority amongſt us; ſince thoſe principles alone can with any reaſon be imputed to us which the church hath owned; and it were the higheſt injuſtice to attribute any opinions to perſons who diſclaim them, and without any better proof that they are theirs, than the word of an adverſary, who may have ignorantly taken up with a falſe and imperfect notion of them himſelf, or have been influenced by his envious and angry paſſions to give them the moſt odious turn, and repreſent them to their diſadvantage.

And it is equally unreaſonable to charge an error, or an extravagancy, which any particular member of a ſociety may fall into, upon the whole body, while perhaps there is not one other that compoſes

compoſes it of the ſame ſentiments: and yet how common a method is this, whereby warm and forward men exert their party-zeal, in defiance of truth and charity? How oft has it been thought ſufficient to juſtify the charge of fanaticiſm upon the Preſbyterians, if an unwary expreſſion or two, or perhaps an enthuſiaſtical notion, could be culled out of one of the meaneſt writers of that denomination, though utterly diſowned by the reſt; and to blacken the whole body with all that abuſive language and ſcandalous treatment that they can afford any colouring to, from the behaviour or writings of any who may pretend, and that falſely, to be of her communion?

Whereas the true account of any party can only be had from their own writings, and, above all, from the public declarations of their faith, and opinions agreed upon by joint conſent of the whole body. And we flatter ourſelves, that we have a more favourable plea than ſome others, to appeal from the ſlanderous or miſtaken judgements that are frequently made of us, to thoſe authentic vouchers of our real principles; becauſe the members of our church have hitherto been unacquainted with the method practiſed elſewhere, of ſubſcribing articles, the primitive and obvious ſenſe whereof is contrary to the inward thoughts of the ſubſcriber: nor have they learned the art of diſtinguiſhing away the deſign and ſignificancy of ſuch teſts of doctrine, and ſubtilizing the ſolemneſt declarations into ſo thin and airy a form, that they can ſubſiſt without any reality, and be complied with, while principles of an entirely different complexion may be both believed and propagated: for, ſo far as we know, there is not one churchman in Scotland (and we are pretty ſure that none will adventure to own the contrary) who does not mean, by ſubſcribing her Confeſſion,

feſſion, to acknowledge his ſincere belief of all the doctrines contained in it, as all the world muſt underſtand the words in the plaineſt and eaſieſt ſenſe: upon which account, it is in a peculiar manner neceſſary, in order to form a juſt repreſentation of our church, to ſtudy her Confeſſions, and take meaſures of her from them.

Were this the method followed by ſome learned men of our neighbouring church, or thoſe amongſt ourſelves who ſeparate from us, they would poſſibly be convinced with how little juſtice ſuch heavy charges have been brought againſt us, our government treated with contempt, and our doctrines loaded with fancied abſurdities, or vilified by ignominious epithets; and we doubt not, but, upon a fair and impartial hearing, though they may not approve of every part, they will yet be perſuaded into a milder opinion of the whole, and more favourable ſentiments of thoſe of our perſuaſion.

It were inconſiſtent with the nature of a preface, to mention all the particulars wherein this might be illuſtrated; we ſhall therefore only inſtance in two or three heads. They will ſee from the 23d chapter of our Confeſſion, concerning the civil magiſtrate, how falſe a bottom all the heavy imputations laid on us by angry adverſaries lean upon, as if we were enemies to order and government, and our principles were inconſiſtent with the peace of ſociety, and the regard due to lawful ſuperiors; ſo that no man could favour us, and at the ſame time be a friend unto Ceſar; ſince, from the account there given of our principles concerning civil government, it will appear, that no church maintains doctrines which conduce more to its real dignity and ſtability, or gives leſs encouragement to the ſpirit of faction, and the clamours of ſeditious and ungovernable minds.

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Our church gives the nobleſt and moſt awful original to the magiſtrate's power, the authority of God himſelf, who hath ordained them to be under him over the people, and armed them with the power of the ſword; and thereby begets a becoming fear and veneration for the rulers of a ſtate. It repreſents this inſtitution as deſigned to promote the moſt glorious ends, and the uſefulleſt and lovelieſt purpoſes, the glory of God, and the public good. And under ſo amiable a view, our church endears it to the affections, and recommends it to the ſincereſt eſteem, and the chearful obedience, of its members; and ſo ſecures the authority and majeſty of the prince upon the happineſs of mankind, and the trueſt intereſt of thoſe that obey; which is a firmer, as well as a nobler foundation, than the doctrines of thoſe who diveſt government of every ſweet and amiable character, while they render it at the ſame time formidable and hateful, by clothing it with fears and horrors, and thereby indeed ſap its foundations, and rob it of its glory and beauty; and in what they call the ſupreme governor, they draw the image of a grim and frightful idol, that may be ſervilely bowed to and adored, but can never be eſteemed or loved.

In a word, that chapter of our Confeſſion will ſhow, that our church allows every thing to a monarch that is ſuitable to the excellency of that God by whom he reigns, that is worthy of his own honour, or that can enable him to accompliſh the great and uſeful ends of his inſtitution; and that our principles are inconſiſtent with nothing but the domination of an arbitrary tyrant, and the inglorious paſſive obedience of a ſlave. And in one thing, I am afraid, we exceed our moſt furious accuſers, in their zeal for the honour of princes, ſince the fourth paragraph of that ſame chapter aſ-

ſerts,

ſerts, "That eccleſiaſtical perſons are not exempt-
"ed from their juriſdiction."

If we paſs from the government of the ſtate to that of the church, a very odious idea is given of us, as if, by being oppoſers of the hierarchy, we overturned the ſacred privileges of the goſpel-miniſtry, or cut the ſinews of eccleſiaſtical authority; and becauſe our conſtitution was not framed upon the ſame model with that of our neighbouring church, we are pronounced a factious and licentious ſect, enemies to order, promoters of confuſion and an unreſtrained liberty, and zealous for levelling principles in the church and the ſtate.

Theſe, together with the other calumnies whereby we are blackened on this occaſion, will appear in many reſpects falſe and injurious, and without any colouring afforded them by our real principles; ſince, from a conſideration of the 25th, 30th, and 31ſt chapters of our Confeſſion, with the Directory, &c. it will be evident, that, how little ſoever our opinions ſooth and flatter the pride and vanity of earthly minds, though they be not calculated for the aſpiring ſchemes of ambition, and muſt lay their account to be vilified and condemned by thoſe who adore worldly greatneſs, and thirſt after a power over the conſciences of mankind, or graſp at a dominion above their brethren, ſuch as the lords of the Gentiles exerciſe, and in all other reſpects they promiſe as little of the pomp and authority of earthly rulers; yet our church, far from patroniſing confuſion and diſorder, maintains it as a fixed principle, "That
"the Lord Jeſus, as king and head of his church,
"hath therein appointed a government, in the hand
"of church-officers, diſtinct from the civil magi-
"ſtrate;" and attributes to theſe church-officers all the power that is neceſſary for the ſacred ends of their appointment, or need be wiſhed for by

ſuch

ſuch as have no ſecret deſign of being *lords over God's heritage*, but can content themſelves with being *helpers of their joy*; ſuch a power as is ſufficient to keep the miniſtry pure and uncorrupted, by admitting none into that number who appear unworthy of ſo holy a character, and turning out any who may have *unawares crept in*, and become, by their ignorance, lazineſs, or diſſolute lives, a ſcandal to their office, and of no uſe to the purpoſes of Chriſtianity.

Nor does our church in any reſpect enervate the vigour of diſcipline, or the force of cenſures, againſt profane and vicious members, who uſurp the Chriſtian name, which they make themſelves unworthy of. Such ſhe allows her ſpiritual rulers to exclude from the ſociety of viſible Chriſtians, or to admoniſh and rebuke with all authority. And however ſenſible we are of numerous defects, and ſhall eaſily acknowledge, that in many inſtances we ſtand in need of further reformation; yet we believe we may with ſome meaſure of confidence be allowed to glory in it, that there is no church, which, in the exerciſe of diſcipline, comes nearer to the primitive model, and the example of thoſe better times, when all the parts of diſcipline were levelled at the reclaiming of offenders, the diſcouraging of vice, and the maintaining the purity of the Chriſtian ſociety; when no cenſure, and much leſs the laſt and ſolemneſt act of eccleſiaſtical power, was proſtituted to mean and unworthy purpoſes, and thereby expoſed to a general contempt; when the ſtrength and force of diſcipline conſiſted in its influence upon the reaſon and conſciences of mankind, and excommunication itſelf had only a ſpiritual efficacy, and was dreaded by Chriſtians as the greateſt puniſhment, from the terrors wherewith it filled guilty minds, and the power it gained in the hearts and breaſts

of

of ſinners, and ſtood in no need of temporal penalties to enforce it, nor was attended by fines and impriſonments; arguments entirely foreign to the ſpiritual genius of that eccleſiaſtical government and diſcipline which was embraced by the pureſt ages, and maintained by none now in a greater degree than by the church of Scotland.

An impartial inquiry into our Confeſſion may have the ſame good effects with regard to the more refined and abſtracted controverſies of religion. It is known to all who have any acquaintance with divinity, with what undue heat and uncharitableneſs the diſputes betwixt the Calviniſts and Arminians have been managed, and what odious repreſentations have been given of the opinions of different parties. The church of Scotland, which hath ever zealouſly eſpouſed the doctrines of the great Calvin, or rather of the inſpired apoſtle Paul, hath on that account received her large ſhare of ill uſage; and the harſheſt notions have been given of all thoſe who came under the common denomination of *Calviniſts*; and that not only by paſſionate little writers, but by men of diſtinguiſhed reputation, and acknowledged temper and abilities.

It is uſual enough, becauſe of our doctrines concerning faith, juſtification, and grace, to exclaim againſt us as perſons who weaken the authority of the divine law, and deny the neceſſity of good works; who encourage our members to a lazy recumbency upon the righteouſneſs of another, and tempt them to the neglect of holineſs in their own life; that our principles are ſo many pillows for ſlothful ſouls to reſt upon, and opiates to lull them aſleep in ſin and ſecurity: and thus we are expoſed as an hateful and abominable ſect, that have little regard to morality and holineſs.

Now, would ſuch have recourſe to our Con-

feſſion, they would ſoon be convinced how great an injury is done to us; ſince, though we own it as our glory, that we entertain exalted thoughts of the grace of the goſpel, and abhor every notion that incroaches upon its ſovereignty, or leſſens its freedom; that we maintain juſtification by faith, and not by works; and would not willingly rob God of any part of the glory and honour of our ſalvation, by aſcribing a ſhare of it to ourſelves, and attributing to our unworthy performances what is wholly owing to the obedience and ſatisfaction of our Saviour: yet no church, in more expreſs terms, affirms the perpetual obligation of the moral law, which is no way diſſolved by the goſpel; the abſolute neceſſity of holineſs in order to ſalvation; the vanity of that faith which is not accompanied with all the other graces of the Chriſtian life, and with good works, which are its genuine fruits and evidences, when true and lively; or is more ſenſible of the fatal miſtake of ſuch who fancy, that Chriſtian liberty gives the leaſt encouragement to the indulgence of any luſt. All which is evident from the whole ſtrain of our Confeſſion.

It will appear as hard and unjuſt treatment, when we are charged with repreſenting the bleſſed God as a ſevere and cruel being, the object only of fears and terrors, becauſe of the doctrine we maintain concerning reprobation; or as a deſpotic and arbitrary monarch, that is not governed by the meaſures of wiſdom and goodneſs, but puniſhes ſin, whereof we make himſelf the author, becauſe of our opinions about the abſoluteneſs of his decrees, the freedom of his electing love, and the ſovereignty of his grace and providence; ſince, how little ſoever they may approve of our ſentiments in theſe matters, they will perceive, that, in as plain and poſitive terms, we own the infinite

purity of the divine nature, and the juſtice of his procedure; remove as far from him the ſmalleſt poſſibility of evil, and attribute the origin of ſin wholly to the creature; and endeavour to give as lovely and amiable notions of the Father of mercies, and to celebrate with as loud and fervent praiſes his unbounded compaſſions, and incomprehenſible goodneſs and patience, as our adverſaries themſelves do.

We know it may be alledged, That, how poſitively however we diſclaim all theſe monſtrous errors, yet they are the neceſſary conſequences of the other doctrines which we avowedly profeſs; ſo that were the one certain, the other would naturally be eſtabliſhed. But were it true, that ſuch blaſphemies could be inferred from our doctrine of abſolute decrees, or any other of the opinions of Calvin; yet it would be contrary to the plaineſt rules of juſtice and charity, to aſcribe thoſe abſurd and impious notions unto us; ſince we, in the loudeſt manner, diſavow them, and profeſs, that we are not able to diſcern, that our doctrines have the ſmalleſt tendency towards thoſe unworthy thoughts of the infinitely holy and merciful God, which we abhor and deteſt as much as they themſelves can do; but believe all our principles conſiſtent with theſe amiable excellencies of the divine nature.

They may, according to their own way of thinking, accuſe us of weakneſs and ignorance, and fancy that our eyes are dim and ſhort-ſighted, when we can diſcern none of thoſe abſurd conſequences which appear ſo clearly to them; but as long as we remain in this condition, deny the ſuppoſed conſequences, and give no reaſon to ſuſpect the ſincerity of our profeſſions, it is evidently injurious ſtill to load us with them, as if they were our real ſentiments; which is indeed to charge upon

on people, not what they truly think and perceive, but what we fancy they ſhould ſee and judge concerning the nature and conſequences of their faith.

We know it is too common for writers on every ſide to blacken their adverſaries; and after they have painted, in the ugliеſt and moſt hateful form, all the blaſphemies and abſurdities which they fancy to be the neceſſary conſequences of their opinions, to charge the whole upon ſuch as differ from them, though as zealous as themſelves againſt thoſe falſe and impious doctrines. Nor ſhall we deny but there are authors of every ſide who make a merit of their art and dexterity in this way of writing; ſeem to think every ſpot wherewith they beſpatter their adverſaries an ornament and beauty of their performance; and that the blacker they make him, they promote more effectually the intereſts of their own party. But a prevailing cuſtom does not render injuſtice and ill-nature leſs culpable; nor does their rarity tarniſh the lovelineſs of moderation and charity, or excuſe a neglect of them by an author.

The treating of an adverſary with fierceneſs, anger, or diſdain; the repreſenting his opinions in the worſt light; and eſpecially the inveighing againſt the blaſphemies or abſurdities which we think flow from his ſchemes, as if they were really a part of them, and adopted by him, with all the other angry arts of controverſy of this kind; inſtead of doing any good, tend equally to the diſgrace of the writer, and the diſadvantage of his cauſe: they argue a proud and imperious ſpirit, that is impatient of contradiction, and expects an abſolute ſubmiſſion from the reſt of the world to its notions and dictates; they flow generally from a narrowneſs and contraction of thought, that can allow no virtuous quality, nor make any fa-

vourable conceſſion to an adverſary; and they almoſt always ſhow, that the writer is of a ſmall extent of learning and reading, and hath confined his inquiries to the authors of his own ſide, and bounded his underſtanding by their party-limits, or darkened it by their errors and prejudices, and ſo is incapable of great and noble advances in knowledge.

Such diſputers demonſtrate, that the prevailing paſſions in their breaſts are wrath, and hatred, and vanity, which have extinguiſhed charity, and juſtice, and humility; and which always make the performance of no effect with an adverſary, and can never reclaim him from an error; becauſe they imbitter his ſpirit, and awaken his reſentment; make him conſider the author as his violent enemy; and enervate the force even of good reaſonings, by perſuading him, that they are as inſignificant as he knows the hideous repreſentations given of his own principles and party, by the ſame writer, are falſe and calumnious: and though they may inflame the zeal of thoſe who are blindly devoted to them, and prepoſſeſſed by the ſame prejudices; yet if ever ſuch become better acquainted with thoſe that differ from them, they will be apter to deſert altogether their former party, and fancy the whole of their doctrines as ill founded, as they ſee the aſperſions groundleſs which were thrown upon adverſaries by their own angry guides.

Were the devil a writer of controverſies, ſuch would be his methods. Satire would undoubtedly be his chief talent; and uncharitable heats, and calumnious repreſentations, and heavy charges upon the contrary ſide, would be engines ſuitable enough to his helliſh temper and deſigns. But it is a ſtrange inconſiſtency in one that pretends to argue in defence of any part of Chriſtianity, ſo

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mild, and gentle, and charitable an inſtitution, a religion, the diſtinguiſhing beauties whereof are love, and benevolence, and forbearance, to do it by artifices which owe their being to impatience, anger, pride, and wrath, as if theſe could ever be uſeful to any thing which belongs to the meek and lowly Jeſus. Modeſty, candour, and charity, are the chief qualities of any writer; but they ſeem to be eſſential to a Chriſtian one.

Some may poſſibly think, that ſuch a fair and impartial inquiry into our real principles will be too laborious; and they may entertain ſo contemptible thoughts of us and them, as to imagine a perfecter knowledge not worth their neceſſary expence of thought and time, however ſmall that be. But we hope we may be allowed to beg this favour of ſuch, that if they ſo far deſpiſe us, they would forbear to calumniate us; and till they can give themſelves the leiſure to know what we are, that they would employ their tongues and pens, as well as thoughts, upon another ſubject; leſt they be numbered amongſt thoſe ſpoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 12. who, "as natural brute beaſts, made to be taken "and deſtroyed, ſpeak evil of the things that they "underſtand not, and ſhall utterly periſh in their "own corruption."

Before we leave this argument, as a proof how eaſily men may miſtake the principles of their adverſaries in abſtruſe metaphyſical ſpeculations, we ſhall crave leave to mention a very palpable miſrepreſentation of Scotch affairs in ſo plain a matter of fact, that an error about it is ſurpriſing, eſpecially when committed by an author famed for his moderation and ingenuity, namely, Sir Richard Steel; who, in his dedication to the Pope of *An account of the ſtate of the Romiſh religion*, publiſhed by him, hath theſe words: "In Scotland, let "a man depart an inch from the Confeſſion of

" Faith, and rule of worſhip, eſtabliſhed by the " Aſſembly there; and he will quickly find, that, " as cold a country as it is, it will be too hot for " him to live in." One would be apt to conclude from theſe words, that we were animated by the perſecuting ſpirit of Popery, and purſued the ſame methods of convincing heretics; and that people were frequently puniſhed in Scotland upon account of non-conformity, or a difference in opinion from the eſtabliſhed church: whereas it is a truth as clear as the ſun, that there is no ſuch thing as perſecution in our church; that perſons enjoy as undiſturbed a freedom of thought in our country as any where elſe; and upon a change of their ſentiments, never feel ſuch an alteration in the climate, as ſhould force them to live elſewhere: nor can one inſtance be given when ever any man was fined, impriſoned, or expoſed to any hardſhip, becauſe of his departing from our Confeſſion.

And it will afterwards appear, that what the ſame author adds, that with us " infants are bap- " tized, not only into the name of the Father, Son, " and Holy Ghoſt, but into the pure doctrine pro- " feſſed and ſettled by the church of Scotland," argues an equal unacquaintedneſs with our conſtitution, and an eaſy credulity in entertaining ſuch notions.

Thus we have in ſome meaſure illuſtrated the firſt purpoſe for which the churches compoſed and publiſhed their Confeſſions of Faith.

II. The ſecond end they propoſed by their Confeſſions was, that, by publiſhing ſo ſolemn and authentic declarations of their faith to the whole world, it might appear with what chearfulneſs and zeal they owned thoſe doctrines; that a religion hated and contemned by the greateſt part of mankind,

kind, was the object of their higheſt eſteem and veneration; and that they were ſo far from being aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, that they gloried in it as their deareſt privilege, and moſt valuable poſſeſſion. By ſuch a public profeſſion alſo of theſe heavenly truths, they intended ſolemnly to declare their gratitude and thankfulneſs to Almighty God, who had brought them to the knowledge thereof. Agreeably hereto, the Bohemians, and the Duke of Wirtemburg, expreſs themſelves in the prefaces to the Confeſſions of their churches.

When God crowns a people with diſtinguiſhing bleſſings, and manifeſts the greatneſs of his excellencies in their behalf, they ſhould not conceal them from the world, or bury them in a diſregardful ſilence, but take all opportunities of ſpreading abroad the fame of his mighty acts, and declaring their gratitude unto him. To this the Pſalmiſt perſuades the oppreſſed who ſhould be delivered by God, Pſal. ix. 11. "Sing praiſes to "the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare a-"mong the people his doings." Pſal. xcvi. 3. "Declare his glory among the Heathen, his won-"ders among all people." And ſuch, it is foretold, will be the grateful temper of Iſrael, when God ſhall convert him to the truth: Iſ. xii. 4. "And in that day ſhall ye ſay, Praiſe the Lord, "call upon his name, declare his doings among "the people, make mention that his name is ex-"alted." Nor is there a leſs obligation upon a public ſociety, than on a private perſon, to imitate the Pſalmiſt's example, Pſal. lxvi. 16. "Come "and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will de-"clare what he hath done for my ſoul." Now, in no inſtance does the Father of mercies manifeſt himſelf to a people under that character in a more illuſtrious manner, than when he diſcovers

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to them the truths of religion, pure and uncorrupted, and cauſes the light of the goſpel, in all its glory, to ſhine in upon them. This is the nobleſt privilege, and moſt valuable gift of providence, which ſhould therefore be acknowledged with the loudeſt ſongs of praiſe; and that church muſt be in the higheſt degree unworthy of the divine favours, and ungrateful to the author of them, that is aſhamed to own the goodneſs of God, or that neglects any opportunity of declaring to all about them, the incomparable value they have for theſe ſtatutes and teſtimonies which he hath revealed to them.

Our church, therefore, upon all occaſions gloried in the doctrines contained in her Confeſſions, and chearfully fell in with this end which moved the churches to compoſe and publiſh ſuch ſyſtems of doctrine. Every time her Confeſſions are publiſhed, ſhe proclaims her adherence to the divine truths contained in them; ſhe boaſts of them as her greateſt honour; and acknowledges her obligations to the infinite goodneſs of our merciful God, who did not leave us groaning under the tyranny of Antichriſt, and wandering amidſt the thick clouds of error and ſuperſtition, which had entirely overſpread that apoſtate church, and overſhadowed the purity and beauty of Chriſtianity with ignorance and idolatry; but diſtinguiſhed us from the nations round about us, by a clear diſcovery of the "doctrine according to godli-"neſs," and giving us open acceſs to our Bibles, wherein we may read the uncorrupted "words of "eternal life"

Our church owns herſelf under peculiar ties to the loudeſt and ferventeſt praiſes of her glorious deliverer We were early bleſſed with the Chriſtian religion; our country, in other reſpect inferior to ſome of our neighbours, was enlightened in

in the firſt ages by the goſpel; and as we received it in its primitive purity, we enjoyed it in its native light and glory, longer than moſt other nations, which ſooner yielded to the growing power of the Roman Pontiff, and, with a mean ſubmiſſion to that uſurped domination over the conſciences of men, embraced all the abſurd opinions, and ſuperſtitious Heatheniſh rites, whereby the luſtre of Chriſtianity was tarniſhed, and its original excellency deſtroyed. The remains of our ancient hiſtory make it highly probable, if not certain, that our eccleſiaſtical government was a long time enlivened by the ſpirit of liberty, and had ſmall acquaintance with that hierarchy which had ſwelled to an exceſſive bulk, and become an intolerable burden upon others; our Culdees ſeem to have breathed that noble freedom, the expiring groans of which were ſcarce remembered in other places; our worſhip alſo, and doctrine, as well as government, enjoyed their primitive ſimplicity, and did not, without ſtruggling, put on the falſe ornaments of worldly pomp, and external magnificence.

And though we at length degenerated, and were carried along with the whole world that *wandered after the beaſt*; yet we were enlightened with the early dawn of the goſpel; the bleſſings of the Reformation were beſtowed upon us with diſtinguiſhing advantages; and that happy change made further advances than it did amongſt others: nor did it ſtop, till, with the tyranny of Rome, it aboliſhed alſo all the innovations in worſhip and government, which had gradually crept into the church, and obſcured the beauty of religion, till at length they had grown ſo thick and numerous, as to occaſion that dark night of Antichriſtian ignorance and idolatry.

Every thing with us that could not plead the earlieſt

earlieſt antiquity and apoſtolical times, was at once thrown aſide, and our whole conſtitution was built alone upon the model of the ſcriptures, which we looked upon as the only meaſure of the Reformation. Nor did we pretend, according to our fancy, to retain ſome picked ceremonies, and obſerve ſome favourite holidays, while we rejected others which were bottomed on the ſame foundation, and had the like authority of councils, and power of once prevailing cuſtom, to plead in their behalf.

That very ſame doctrine which the Reformation brought into our church, was afterwards preſerved entire, and is now publiſhed in our Confeſſion of Faith. The ſame ſpirit of liberty animates the whole of our conſtitution, which inſpired our firſt efforts againſt Rome. We can never, therefore, enough expreſs our gratitude to that over-ruling Providence which hath preſerved thoſe bleſſings to us by a train of wonders, and maintained a church that had no worldly ſupport, nor was calculated for temporal deſigns, amidſt a throng of dangers on every ſide: ſo that neither the cunning of politics, nor the violence of the ſevereſt perſecution, and the terrors of laws that became a reproach to humanity, were effectual to deſtroy it; but it hath ſurmounted the moſt ſhocking difficulties, and outbraved the moſt furious aſſaults of rage and cruelty. The hiſtory of our church juſtifies the choice ſhe has made of the *buſh burning, and never conſumed*, as an emblem of her paſt ſtate, and her future hopes. We ſtill own our adherence to this conſtitution, which hath been ſo violently attacked, and ſo glorioufly maintained and preſerved. And now, when in the haven of tranquillity, we look back with pleaſure and thankfulneſs upon the darkneſs and horrors of the *land of Egypt*, from the bondage whereof

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the Reformation brought us up; and calling to mind the ſtorms and tempeſts which were big with threatened ruin, and toſſed this church about upon the boiſterous ocean of tyranny and perſecution, we offer up our ſacrifices of thankſgiving; and being in a like ſtate, account ourſelves under the ſame obligations with thoſe mentioned Pſal. cvii. 31. 32. (who, after being expoſed to the fury of the winds, and the rage of the billows, which made them deſpair of ſafety, were brought to their deſired haven), "to praiſe the Lord for "his goodneſs, and for his wonderful works to "the children of men; to exalt him alſo in the "congregation of the people, and praiſe him in "the aſſembly of the elders."

It is a duty which, upon all occaſions, Chriſtians owe to the truths of the goſpel, to own them with confidence, and never to be aſhamed to profeſs before men their eſteem of them; but there are ſome ſeaſons which afford peculiar motives to the moſt open declarations hereof, and call upon them to publiſh their faith to the world, and glory in it as their higheſt dignity. If, for example, any of the doctrines of our holy religion ſhould be expoſed to contempt and ignominy, run down by clamour, and loaded with reproaches; if the inſtitutions of Chriſt ſhould be looked down upon with diſdain by the rich and great, and repreſented as rude and inſignificant by the wiſe and learned; if they were deſerted by thoſe who once maintained them, and the perſons and churches once famed for their zeal, ſhould ſuffer their purity to be gradually ſtained, and make compliances with the manners and ſchemes of the world: it were mean and inglorious in ſuch a caſe for a church that hath preſerved her integrity, to be aſhamed of her doctrine, and retire into a corner. Then God expects that ſhe ſhould openly acknowledge contemned

temned truth; and the more it is miſrepreſented and vilified by others, that ſhe ſhould the more warmly embrace it, and the more loudly eſpouſe its intereſts.

When therefore numberleſs hereſies have crept into the church, and the inchantments of error have bewitched the minds of men, ſo that, with the greateſt part, ignorance and falſehood triumph over the intereſts of truth, and overcloud the purity of goſpel-light; and when ſome of the moſt important doctrines of Chriſtianity, which were reputed of the higheſt value by our fathers at the Reformation, and embraced with the warmeſt affections, are not only diſbelieved, but reproached, and ſuch as profeſs them branded with the moſt odious characters, and contemned as men of narrow ſouls and ſhallow capacities, if not hated and abominated as blaſphemous and impious; when this is the unworthy ſtate of the doctrines, particularly of electing love, and victorious grace; of the independency of God's decrees, and his ſupreme irreſiſtible dominion over his creatures, with others of the ſame kind, the church of Scotland is not aſhamed of her Confeſſion, where theſe principles are aſſerted in their full extent and purity. She glories in them as her higheſt honour, and accounts it an incomparable privilege that all her members retain the faith of the Reformation; eſpecially that doctrine which is calculated for exalting the ſovereignty of divine grace, and the attributing every ſtep in the ſalvation and happineſs of ſinners to God, and no part of it to apoſtate man. She undervalues the calumnies and the ſcorn of inſulting adverſaries, and hopes never to be moved from her principles by ſlander and ignominy. Clamour and noiſe, contempt and reproach, in ſuch a cauſe, ſhe *takes upon her ſhoul-*

ders, and binds upon her head as a crown of glory.

And the greater hazard that the purity of divine truth may be in of loſing a part of its luſtre and beauty in ſome Proteſtant churches, where it might have been hoped theſe would have ſhone with a laſting brightneſs, free from interpoſing clouds, our church reckons it the more diſtinguiſhing honour which ſhe is dignified with, in being enabled ſteadily to maintain her old principles, and being free from the contagion of error, which proves ſo univerſally infectious, and values herſelf the higher for this ineſtimable advantage.

We in the ſame manner celebrate the goodneſs of God, which carried our Reformation to ſuch a high pitch of perfection, with reſpect to our government and worſhip, and delivered them from all that vain pomp which darkened the glory of the goſpel-ſervice, and the whole of theſe ſuperſtitious or inſignificant inventions of an imaginary decency and order, which ſullied the divine beauty and luſtre of that noble ſimplicity that diſtinguiſhed the devotions of the apoſtolical times; and our church glories in the primitive plainneſs of her worſhip, more than in all the foreign ornaments borrowed from this world, though theſe appear indeed incomparably more charming to earthly minds.

We are ſenſible that it is a neceſſary conſequence of the nature of our Reformation in theſe particulars, that there is nothing left in our worſhip which is proper to captivate the ſenſes of mankind, or amuſe their imaginations. We have no magnificence and ſplendor of devotion to dazzle the eye, nor harmony of inſtrumental muſic to enliven our worſhip, and ſooth the ears of the aſſembly. Pomp, and ſhow, and ceremony, are entirely ſtrangers in our churches; and we have little in common with that

apoſtate church, whoſe yoke we threw off at the Reformation, or with the exterior greatneſs and magnificence of the Jewiſh temple and its ſervice.

For which reaſon, we know we muſt lay our account to be deſpiſed by the men of this world, who value nothing that is ſtripped of the allurements of ſenſe, and fancy that a rich and gaudy dreſs contributes to the majeſty, and raiſes the excellency, of religious ſervice; who ſeek for the ſame dazzling pomp and ſplendid appearances to recommend their worſhip, which they are ſo fond of in their equipage and tables; and think that a veneration and reſpect to the ſervice of the church is to be raiſed by the ſame methods that procure an eſteem and fondneſs for a court. We have nothing to tempt perſons of ſuch inclinations; we know they will entertain the meaneſt thoughts, and moſt diſdainful notions, of a worſhip too plain and homely for them, and fit only for the rude and unmannerly multitude, who have not a delicate enough taſte of what is truly great and noble.

But how much ſoever upon this account we may be deſpiſed by the great and the learned, the church of Scotland, we hope, will always publicly own the ſimplicity and plainneſs of her worſhip as her peculiar glory; and believe, that theſe, to a ſpiritual eye, are beautified with a luſtre which external objects are incapable of, and of too elevated a nature for the ſenſes to look at. She is not aſhamed to acknowledge her ſentiments, that the devotions of Chriſtians ſtand in no need of the outward helps afforded to the Jews, and that the triumphs of all-conquering love, the mighty acts of a Redeemer, all the powers and glories of an immortal life, that are repreſented to our wonder and meditation under the goſpel, are far more nobler ſprings of devotion, and fitter to animate with a chearful zeal, and inſpire the moſt fervent

affections

affections, than the meaner helps afforded under the law, the coſtlineſs of pontifical garments, the glory of a magnificent temple, the ceremony of worſhip, and the power of muſic.

Our church believes it to be one deſign of the better reformation of things, to raiſe the Chriſtian worſhippers above the airy grandeur of ſenſe; and inſtead of a laborious ſervice, to introduce a worſhip worthy of the Father of ſpirits, that ſhould be truly great and manly, the beauty and the power whereof ſhould be ſpirit and life, and which, inſtead of a ſervile imitation of the temple, ſhould be all purified reaſon and religion, and make the neareſt approaches to the devotion of the heavenly ſtate, where *there is no temple*: and how deſpicable ſoever this may appear to earthly minds, and diſtaſteful to the ſenſes, that are pleaſed with ſhow and appearance, we are not afraid to own, that we believe that an imitation of our bleſſed Redeemer and his apoſtles, in the plainneſs and ſpirituality of their devotions, and an endeavour to copy after the example of theſe truly primitive times, will ever bear us up to all the juſt decency and order of the goſpel-church; and that, in a conformity hereto, the naked ſimplicity of our worſhip is beautified with a ſuperior luſtre, and ſhines with a brightneſs that is more worthy of it than when dreſſed in the gayeſt colours, and buſked up with the richeſt and moſt artful ornaments of human fancy and contrivance.

Were we in this nation poſſeſſed by a juſt value for theſe incomparable advantages of our Reformation, and had a due eſteem for its purity, and the uncommon advances it hath made in our church, with what pleaſure would we celebrate theſe heavenly bleſſings with the loudeſt ſongs! Animated by a noble pride, we would value ourſelves beyond others, and boaſt that we were raiſed

ſed to a more elevated and happy ſituation than thoſe kingdoms that can ſpeak of the glory of victories, and the pomp of triumphs, and the ſplendor of greatneſs. Without any repinings of envy, we would look back upon the fertility of ſoil, the affluence of pleaſures, which other countries exceed us in, upon their trade, and luxury, and riches, when flowing in with the higheſt tide of plenty. How incomparably would we think thoſe temporal advantages overbalanced by the bleſſings of our Reformation, by his *word which he ſhewed unto us*, and the *ſtatutes* and *judgements* that with ſo bright a light he hath diſcovered. And thus, while *the wiſe gloried in their wiſdom, the mighty in their might*, or the *rich in their riches*, in this would we glory with a nobler triumph, that the Lord hath given us in ſuch a manner *to know and underſtand him*.

Before we leave this ſubject, we ſhall obſerve one thing which poſſibly might influence our Reformation, and be in ſome meaſure the reaſon of its making a happier progreſs with us than it did with others.

Amongſt the ſeveral Proteſtant churches that departed from Rome, there was this remarkable difference, that with ſome the alteration of religion happened under the protection, and by the aſſiſtance, of the civil government. Such as were in authority fell in with the deſign, and kings and princes were the chief who promoted it, and put themſelves at the head of the Reformation; ſo that a change was made in the eſtabliſhed religion without any confuſion or irregularity; and this was in particular the ſo-much-boaſted-of privilege of the church of England.

In other places, the prince ſtuck cloſe to the old way, adhered to the idolatry and tyranny of Popery, and employed his power and authority in cruſhing

cruſhing the Reformation, and perſecuting thoſe who embraced it; which brought the profeſſors of the true religion under a neceſſity to maintain by arms the freedom of their conſciences, and the liberties of their country, againſt the fury of their arbitrary ſovereigns; whereby the conſtitution was expoſed to mighty convulſions and diſorders; and the light of the goſpel, which then begun to ſhine in its brightneſs, ſeemed to be obſcured by the blood and confuſion which accompanied its riſe and progreſs: yet, through the admirable management of divine Providence, the uncommon purity of our Reformation ſeems to be in ſome meaſure owing to theſe diſadvantageous circumſtances of it.

A mighty zeal animated our fathers, who had been enlightened by the goſpel, and were making their way out of Babylon. Their breaſts were inflamed with an ardent love to truth, and their affections enlivened by a warm diſintereſted regard to its intereſts. They were ſtruck with amazement at the terrible bondage which had for ſo many ages enſlaved the world, and the thick darkneſs of ſuperſtition and ignorance in which the church was overwhelmed. The fatal conſequences and monſtrous abſurdities hereof awakened their reſentment againſt Antichriſt, filled them with horror at his abominations, and put life into their endeavours. They reſolved immediately to believe nothing but what the ſcriptures taught, and to make thoſe divine oracles the meaſure of their worſhip and government, as well as the ſtandard of their doctrine.

The generous ſpirit of liberty breathed with an univerſal vigour, and the noble ſoul of the Reformation envigorated every part; ſo that no diſtinction was made of days and ceremonies, which were alike deſtitute of ſcripture-ſupport. They

did not apply themſelves to pick out from amongſt the reſt the faireſt and leaſt hazardous fruits that were nouriſhed by human fancy and art; nor did they ſtand to make a compoſition with the degeneracy of religion: but the ſpirit and the genius of the Reformation, like a mighty torrent, bore all down before it that had not the apoſtolical times to keep it up; and the people did not then *conſult with fleſh and blood*, or make worldly politics or earthly views diſtinguiſh betwixt things which were alike blameable and unwarrantable; and therefore we find, where-ever this heroic zeal animated our fathers, and the ſpirit of the Reformation was not hemmed in by ſome outward reſtraints, that it univerſally ſpread its influence through every branch of worſhip. Thus, in Holland, Switzerland, France, ſeveral parts of Germany, &c. and in our own country, where the Reformation begun amongſt the people, though diſcouraged by the civil magiſtrate, the above-named advances in the purity and ſimplicity of worſhip and government were made.

Whereas, though it was in ſome reſpects the happineſs of our neighbouring church, that matters were carried on with more regularity, and the intereſts of religion grew up under the ſhadow of lawful authority; yet this very thing ſeems to have deprived the ſpirit of the Reformation of its unlimited freedom, and reſtrained its efficacy. Nor could that heroic zeal which glowed in the breaſts of our fathers exert itſelf ſo univerſally, and with ſo diffuſive influences; becauſe, as the Reformation was there aſſiſted by ſecular powers, ſo it was modelled according to their taſte and humour; fleſh and blood bore a ſhare in the counſels which managed it, and an intermixture of worldly politics and intereſts ſtopped its progreſs,

and

and overſhadowed its purity and beauty by ſome remains of the old ſuperſtitions.

Henry VIII. all whoſe zeal againſt Rome took its riſe from the impetuoſity of his own paſſions, and terminated wholly in himſelf, had little thought of making any changes, but ſuch as might be ſubſervient to his luſt and ambition; and that great princeſs, who, it muſt be owned, was moved by greater views, was yet in every thing a lover of pomp and magnificence; and therefore the worſhip which was reformed by her, was neceſſitated to retain a great part of its ſhow and ceremony, which ſhe was ſo fond of, and which in all places are too agreeable to the taſte of the rich and great, whoſe depraved appetites nauſeate the ſimplicity of divine things. In the ſettling of eccleſiaſtical affairs, the genius of the court intermixed itſelf with, and in ſome inſtances prevailed over, that of the goſpel; and both the government and worſhip were too much adapted to the model of the civil conſtitution, and to the humour of fecular greatneſs, and framed ſo as to become ſubſervient to the views and deſigns of the prince; whereby the ſpirit of the Reformation was extremely enervated, and could not exert itſelf with ſo much life and ſucceſs, as it did in thoſe places where there was not ſo much room for the influence of ſuch principles, the people having reformed of themſelves, without the ſovereign. And what indeed the native tendency of the Reformation every where was, had it been left to its own genius, ſeems to appear from the conduct and doctrine of many of the firſt Reformers of the church of England, whoſe principles were of the ſame nature with ours, and plainly lead the ſame way.

As all courts are in love with magnificence, and dote with fondneſs on the rich and ſplendid appearances

pearances of an external majeſty and elevation; and as the maxims of princes are almoſt every where the ſame; ſo we find the Reformation was in ſome meaſure managed in a ſuitableneſs thereto, in the ſeveral countries where it was carried on by the civil government, and modelled by the interpoſition of the prince. Thus, in Sweden, Denmark, &c. as well as in England, their eccleſiaſtical government, and religious devotions, breathe more of the air of the court, and are more adjuſted to the maxims of ſecular ſtate and grandeur.

III. A third purpoſe which the Chriſtian churches have all along propoſed to themſelves in publiſhing their confeſſions, was, that they might contribute to the mutual comfort and edification of one another, maintain a good correſpondence, and increaſe brotherly love, by ſhowing how far, and in how momentuous things, they agreed together.

A ſoul inflamed with the love of God, and animated by a fervent zeal for religion, cannot miſs to feel a ſenſible pleaſure when its intereſts flouriſh in the world, and truth and purity make advances, or maintain themſelves, amidſt the powerful and vigilant enemies which the church is always ſurrounded by, and the dangerous ſnares and difficulties it hath to grapple with. For, as all the faithful ſubjects of the Meſſiah's kingdom obey him with the moſt unconſtrained willingneſs, and love him with the warmeſt affections, the glory of his empire becomes the deareſt object of their wiſhes; and the brighter it grows, and the more his throne is exalted, the greater joy flows into their panting hearts; and each of the victories which light and truth obtain over error and ignorance, is attended with louder acclamations, and

carries

carries alongſt with it into their ſouls a more exquiſite delight, than ever the greateſt conqueſts of the braveſt and happieſt generals occaſioned to the citizen that was moſt zealous for the glory of his country, and the honour of Rome.

And therefore thoſe churches which embrace the ſame doctrines of Chriſtianity, do, by publiſhing authentic declarations of their faith, give mutual ſatisfaction to one another, and yield to the whole body that pleaſure which a ſoul inſpired with the higheſt eſteem and affection for truth muſt receive from its propagation and advancement in the world. And as every ſinner that is converted upon earth, gives life and vigour to the ſatisfaction of heaven itſelf, and is a ſource of delight to the angels; ſo the new diſcoveries which every ſaint on earth can make, of a church or a perſon's maintaining the ſame faith with himſelf, eſpecially when it may be abandoned and vilified by thoſe about him, will enliven his ſpirits, and comfort his ſoul. But we hope, that our Confeſſion will in a peculiar manner gain this end, ſince it belongs to a church, all the members whereof, as we have reaſon to believe, ſincerely maintain the faith contained in it, without impoſing upon themſelves and the world, by artful diſtinctions and ſubtilties, or making uſe of the arguments of blood and perſecution to preſerve or propagate that faith.

And the only reaſon why men have not a feeling value of the nobleneſs and excellency of this end of Confeſſions, is, becauſe ſo few are inſpired with an affectionate regard for religion and truth, and make *Jeruſalem their chiefeſt joy*; the degenerate profeſſors of Chriſtianity ſo univerſally preferring their own things to thoſe of Chriſt; and ſo they are little affected, either with the rage and

and prevalency of his enemies, or the triumphs of his victorious grace and love in the world.

The ſeveral churches of Chriſt ſcattered throughout different kingdoms, by whatever peculiarities they be diſtinguiſhed from one another, do yet compoſe but one ſociety, and are all members of that one body whereof Chriſt Jeſus is the head. Whenever they merit that name, they are animated by the ſame ſpirit, governed by the ſame maxims, and envigorated by ſtrength, and courage, and perſeverance, derived from one ſource, and *drawn from the ſame wells of ſalvation.* The relation which they ſtand under to their common Lord and Saviour, joins together all the ſubjects of this glorious kingdom by the ſtricteſt bonds of union, and lays them under inviolable obligations to every thing which can tend to promote it, and to the moſt intimate friendſhip, ardent love, and univerſal charity.

Hence all the churches, how diſtant ſoever in place and condition, whether in a flouriſhing or perſecuted ſtate, and though differing, it may be, in complexion, and ſome leſs remarkable features, ought to maintain an uninterrupted communion, and keep up that fellowſhip with one another which they all enjoy *with the Father and the Son:* and it were to be wiſhed, that more, even of an external union and friendſhip, a communication of counſels and occurrences, could obtain amongſt Chriſtians; and that ſuitable methods could be fallen upon to beget a good correſpondence, and keep up a familiarity amongſt the ſeveral churches, who are all *baptized into the ſame God and Saviour.*

Now one of thoſe things by which the members of Chriſt's myſtical body are to maintain mutual communion, is the fameneſs of their faith and doctrine, and an agreement in a belief of thoſe important

portant truths of religion which are taught in the goſpel. Hence the apoſtle, recommending unity amongſt Chriſtians, and ſhowing wherein it conſiſts, mentions faith as one conſiderable inſtance, Eph. iv. 5. *One Lord*, ſays he, *one faith, one baptiſm*; and it is repreſented as the deſign of all divine ordinances, "that they may be brought in "the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the "Son of God, unto a perfect man." Now it will be eaſily perceived how well adapted creeds are to promote this act of Chriſtian communion.

The church of Scotland, therefore, by this her Confeſſion, embraces with the ſincereſt love and friendſhip, and joins in the moſt extenſive fellowſhip with all thoſe through the world that receive the ſame common faith, and declares her inviolable affection and unity with all ſuch as believe the important truths of the glorious goſpel, entertain the hope of the great ſalvation, and the neceſſary means to attain it; though the nearer they approach to her in the belief of thoſe truths that may be of an inferior nature, this communion becomes ſtricter and more intimate.

It hath occaſioned a ſenſible concern to all who value religion and goodneſs, and hath been the frequent object of their regret and ſorrow, that there ſhould be ſo many lamentable diviſions amongſt the Proteſtant churches, who were united together in throwing off the yoke of Antichriſt, and in their generous efforts againſt that ſpiritual tyranny, and ſeemed all then to be animated by the ſame noble ſpirit, and to move towards the ſame end; but have ſince, to the reproach of our holy religion, and the ſcandal of adverſaries, given way to a ſpirit of faction and diſcord, crumbled into parties, and formed diſtinct ſects. Lutherans and Calviniſts, Preſbyterians and Epiſcopals, &c. have ſeparated from one another, under different denominations,

denominations, ſet up interfering intereſts, and purſued contrary meaſures.

How much ſoever it were to be wiſhed, it can ſcarce indeed be ever expected, while we breathe the impure and cloudy air of theſe lower regions, that ſincere Chriſtians ſhould agree in all their opinions about ſmaller matters, and their notions concerning the circumſtantials of religion; ſince *we here know but in part, and ſee darkly as through a glaſs.* A perfect agreement in judgement, and abſolute unity of faith, are reſerved for that world of light and purity, where God himſelf being the ſun, the invariable light of truth flows, without an interpoſing cloud, into all thoſe purified ſouls that are perfectly fit to entertain it in its unmixed glory.

But it is a melancholy conſideration, and altogether inexcuſeable, when charity is the peculiar character of our religion, and when it is one of its plaineſt, as well as moſt important precepts, That, ſtudying mutual forbearance, "whereunto "we have already attained, we ſhould all walk by "the ſame rule, and mind the ſame things;" that yet Proteſtants ſhould be more alienated from one another in their affections, than they are divided in their ſentiments; and that the ſeveral parties, upon numberleſs occaſions, manifeſt the greateſt bitterneſs and hatred againſt one another, and give a looſe to all the impetuoſity of paſſion, and reſentment, and envy; load one another with the blackeſt calumnies, and exert the greateſt warmth and keenneſs of party zeal in a mutual oppoſition; and that, even where matters arrived not to ſo great an extremity, univerſal experience is too fruitful an evidence, that a difference of ſentiments in religious matters, eſpecially amongſt ſeparate churches, is attended with a coldneſs of affection, and a faintneſs and languiſhing, if not a

total extinction of love; as if a diſagreement in opinion, or zeal for a truth of confeſſedly ſmaller importance, could excuſe a contempt of the moſt momentous commands of our Saviour, and a trampling on thoſe graces, the begetting of which in us is the deſign of his ſufferings, and the ſcope of all his doctrines; and which will remain the glory and ornament of a heavenly religion, when victorious Charity will ſhine with an undiminiſhed beauty and luſtre, after the grave hath drawn a ſhadow over Faith and Hope.

Now there are few things which will conduce more ſucceſsfully to beget theſe noble virtues of Chriſtianity, revive moderation and forbearance amongſt the Proteſtant churches, and maintain a friendly correſpondence, than a right improvement and an attentive conſideration of their ſeveral Confeſſions of Faith; becauſe thereby it will be evident, that they agree, not only in the eſſential foundations of religion, but in all the principles of ſpecial moment; and that thoſe which any of them differ about, are no wiſe comparable to the others, either for their number or importance. One ſhould think, that an agreement in any principle of moment ſhould be at leaſt as apt to warm the affections of Chriſtians, and inſpire them with a mutual love; as a difference in another, perhaps diſputable opinion, and a pretended zeal for religion in maintaining it, are effectual to engender ſtrife and animoſity.

Would, therefore, the ſeveral parties of Proteſtants but ſeriouſly conſider in what great things we all concur, That we are the ſubjects of the ſame Almighty King, and equally profeſs our *hope of the common ſalvation*; That we agree all in the belief of Jeſus being the Meſſiah, of the glorious things that a Chriſtian is raiſed to the expectation of, and the proper means to attain theſe

bleſſings, the faith and obedience of the goſpel; That we join in the principles of the Reformation, and profeſs a mutual abhorrence of the idolatry and abominations of the Antichriſtian church; and thus *have one hope, one faith, one baptiſm:* in a word, did we conſider, that men of all theſe diviſions may be alike *pilgrims and ſtrangers in this world,* animated by the proſpect of the regions of light and day, when the clouds that now darken and perplex us will be entirely diſſipated, and may all in ſincerity make religion their principal ſtudy, and agree in their choice of God for their portion, and preferring the honour of Chriſt to their quickeſt joys; how would the meditation hereof ſtifle our angry paſſions, and cool our unnatural heats? Our being united in the love and ſervice of our common maſter, would reconcile the keeneſt diſputants, and blunt the edge of controverſy: we would be aſhamed of our uncharitableneſs and impatience, and bluſh at the treatment we give to thoſe that may be members of the ſame body whereof Chriſt is the head. Our hearts would relent, and our bowels would be moved, when we reflected on the endearments of a heavenly friendſhip, which, notwithſtanding of our preſent little differences, we may all be exalted to the eternal enjoyment of. And ſure, could there be any ſhame in that happy place, no doubt we would be then confounded at the ſight of many there, whom we treated as enemies upon earth, and purſued with bitter and incurable reſentments or prejudices.

Did we thus improve the harmony of the Proteſtant Confeſſions, we would embrace one another with the warmeſt affections, and manage our debates with coolneſs and moderation; and we are ſure controverſies ſweetened with temper and charity, would be much readier to gain converts, and

and bring us to an uniformity, than the way in which they are at preſent managed. An extenſive charity, and a noble freedom of love, that are unconfined by the little diſtinctions of parties and ſchemes, would unite good men of all denominations, and make virtue and piety every where eſteemed and loved; and that warmth and zeal which are ſo uſeleſsly or hurtfully ſpent in our inteſtine feuds, would be employed in a vigorous oppoſition to our common enemies, and joint efforts againſt the prevailing intereſt of darkneſs and wickedneſs.

Upon this occaſion it will not be improper alſo to obſerve, that by comparing together the doctrines of the Proteſtant churches, it will appear, that as to thoſe opinions in which we differ from our neighbours in England, about government and worſhip, we have on our ſide a better claim to the ſuffrages of all thoſe churches beyond ſea who with us threw off the Romiſh yoke; and that thoſe diſtinguiſhed by the name of *High church*, who have ſtretched their ſchemes about the abſolute neceſſity of Epiſcopal ordination, baptiſm, and communion, in ſuch an extravagant manner, muſt, together with us, and their own Diſſenters, unchurch almoſt all the other Proteſtants but themſelves; which plain conſequence will readily expoſe their narrow bigotry and vanity to contempt with all who have a value for the Proteſtant cauſe; and we hope, that the ranking with Heathens and publicans ſo many great and good men, at once damning all the heroic martyrs of the Reformation, may fill even themſelves with horror, beget in them ſome remorſe, and engage them to examine a little more coolly the nature and tendency of ſo wild and uncharitable principles.

As for us, we pity their impotent malice, and are content to run the common fate of Proteſt-

ants. Their thunders and excommunications breed no diſturbance in our conſciences, ſince we know they are ſo contradictory to the ſpirit and genius of Chriſtianity; and whatever impreſſions they may make here below upon blind and furious minds, we are in no fears of their impoſing on our great maſter, or becoming of reputation in the kingdom of love and charity.

Some other things might be obſerved, which will be as conveniently mentioned at the end of this preface.

PART II.

Concerning that end of Confeſſions which particularly reſpects the rulers and paſtors of the church, when creeds are eſtabliſhed as a ſtandard of orthodoxy, and muſt be ſubſcribed by eccleſiaſtical officers.

WE come now to conſider the ſecond general end for which Confeſſions of Faith were framed, namely, to ſecure the purity of the Chriſtian doctrine from the many contagious hereſies which in all ages have infeſted the church; to diſtinguiſh betwixt thoſe who were infected by prevailing error, and ſuch as perſevered in the uncorrupted faith of the goſpel; and ſo to diſcover who in this reſpect ſhould be admitted into the communion of ſaints, or might, without danger to religion and truth, be ordained to, or continued in, the ſacred office of the miniſtry; for which purpoſes, ſubſcriptions were required to certain articles, that were ſuited to the circumſtances of the church, and contradicted the principal

cipal errors which prevailed in different ages, and the danger whereof was moſt apprehended.

I. CREEDS and Confeſſions have been thus uſed as a teſt of orthodoxy in all ages, and in all places. Every body who is in the leaſt acquainted with eccleſiaſtical affairs, knows the ſentiments and practice of the ancient church about this matter. Beſides the ſhorter creeds, which were univerſally received, upon any difference that aroſe amongſt the fathers, councils were ſummoned, and deciſions were made, to which all were obliged to yield their aſſent who had a mind to continue in communion with the church. Nor did they confine their determinations to matters of importance, but doubtful opinions, which had no great influence on either the doctrines or precepts of Chriſtianity, were made the ſubjects of fierce conteſts and poſitive deciſions.

In the declining ages of the church, when a thick darkneſs overſpread the world, and all the freedoms of a Chriſtian, and the liberties of a man, were trampled under the feet of a tyrannical domination, which univerſally prevailed, this uſe of Confeſſions was, among other things, miſerably perverted, and proſtituted to ſerve the worſt and cruelleſt deſigns. Popes and councils poſſeſſed themſelves of the ſacred authority of the ſcriptures, and claimed a blind and undiſputed ſubmiſſion to their infallible decrees; and fire and ſword were the neceſſary arguments to ſupport opinions which diſdained to ſubmit to a fair examination.

At the Reformation, when our heroic fathers made ſo glorious a ſtand for their Chriſtian liberty, and threw off the ſhameful yoke which had been wreathed by Rome about the neck of the world; tho' they received the holy ſcriptures as the

only rule of their faith, and deteſted any pretended infallibility which could be claimed by Popes and councils, and an abſolute ſubmiſſion to their deciſions; yet they did not altogether reject Creeds and Confeſſions; but, rectifying the great abuſes of them, ſtill continued them as a means of preſerving the purity of Chriſtian doctrine, and preventing the ſpreading of hereſy.

Hence all the Proteſtant churches obliged at leaſt their miniſters to diſclaim thoſe errors which then obtained, and were in greateſt hazard of being propagated; and to own thoſe momentous truths which any heretics endeavoured to overturn; and for that end to ſubſcribe the public Confeſſions, that were calculated to the different circumſtances of the ſeveral churches. They hereby alſo intended to maintain an uniformity and harmony in the public adminiſtrations of the church, which is of ſo great conſequence to its peace and happineſs; and to ſecure it againſt thoſe animoſities and diſorders which muſt naturally flow from the paſtors of any place teaching the people different and contradictory opinions.

Agreeably hereto the Duke of Wirtemberg expreſſes himſelf in the preface to the Wirtemberg Confeſſion: "Magna hominum pernicie fit, "ſi aut fons unde omnes bibunt veneno inficia-"tur, aut publica moneta adulteretur; multa "autem majore fit pernicie ſi cœleſtis doctrina, è "qua ſalus univerſæ eccleſiæ pendet, vanitate et "impietate corrumpatur: conſtituimus igitur hoc "noſtræ confeſſionis ſcriptum, quod paucis ſum-"mum doctrinæ continet, proponere, ut fontem "veræ ſalutaris doctrinæ purum atque integrum "in eccleſiis noſtræ regionis conſervaremus, et "monetam quæ nobis imaginem cœleſtis Patris "refert a corruptione (quod in nobis eſt) tuere-"mur." This End of Confeſſions is in like manner

ner accounted for by the Polonian churches: "Qui dictus conſenſus noſter," ſay they, "hacte-"nus a nobis non modo eſt fideliter ſervatus, ſed "etiam deinceps in aliquot generalibus ſynodis "renovatus et confirmatus, — Illis qui litium ſcin-"tillas excitare videbantur ingenuè correctis, ac "intra limites pacis reductis, atque ita vinculo "concordiæ et amoris fraterni arctius aſtricto." And, after mentioning ſome other deſigns of their Confeſſion, they add what follows. "Ac ſi qui "forte etiam inter nos reperirentur philauti, qui "communem tranquillitatem turbare niterentur, "ſcandalaque excitarent, et patientia fratrum ab-"utentes, commoniti non ſe cohiberent: eſſe "contra eos in promptu juſtum eccleſiaſticæ diſ-"ciplinæ rigorem, ut coerceantur, et contumaces "ex eccleſia communioneque noſtra, authoritate "canonum ſynodicorum, excludantur." For this end alſo the articles of the church of England are ſaid to be compoſed, "for the avoiding of the "diverſities of opinions, and for the ſtabliſhing of "conſent touching true religion." And it ſhall appear more particularly afterwards, how far, and in what manner, the Confeſſion of the church of Scotland is made ſubſervient to this end.

But with how conſtant and general ſoever a conſent the Chriſtian churches have required from their miniſters or members an aſſent to the ſeve-ral articles of faith eſtabliſhed by them, this uſe of Confeſſions hath had many adverſaries, and is exclaimed againſt and oppoſed by a variety of par-ties, who, though they agree in a common diſe-ſteem and averſion to creeds, may be moved here-in by very different ſprings, and purſue different ends.

In general, the warmeſt oppoſition, and the loudeſt clamours againſt Confeſſions, have been raiſed by thoſe who, being the leſſer and weaker

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part of the ſociety, had not the framing of them, nor were able to adapt the public ſtandard to their own favourite ſchemes and notions. Such were angry at Confeſſions, not ſo much becauſe of their abſurdity or inconveniencies, but becauſe they were not theirs; and a change of this little circumſtance would have ſoon diſſipated all the frightful images of tyranny, and ignorance, and impoſition, whereby they had rendered compoſitions of this nature ſo extremely terrible, and at once reconciled them to liberty, and religion, and learning.

Every day's experience ſhows how natural it is for the greateſt part of mankind to grumble at meaſures of which they have not the direction, and to repreſent the determination of any ſociety as unjuſt and arbitrary, when the reins of government are not in their own hands; nor is it improbable but this is the ſecret ſpring which hath in all ages given vigour to the contempt and hatred ſhown to articles of faith. Thoſe who were outvoted in councils, became eaſily impreſſed with prejudices againſt all their actings, and ſoon entertained unfavourable notions of the authority which they claimed; and whenever an eſtabliſhed Confeſſion contradicted their particular opinions, it awakened their reſentment, and ſoured their temper, and they looked upon ſuch a Confeſſion as their declared enemy; and were therefore naturally led, not only to vilify and expoſe it, but to give the moſt hateful and deſpicable ideas of all Creeds and Confeſſions, that thereby they might effectually blunt the edge of a weapon which they ſaw turned againſt them; and as vanity, pride, and ambition, theſe ſtrong ſelfiſh paſſions, thus intermixed themſelves with the queſtion, and animated their quarrel with Confeſſions of Faith, it will be eaſily conceived, how warm and zealous

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the oppoſition to them would become. And though we are far from thinking, that this ſhould be applied to all thoſe who differ from us in their ſentiments concerning the articles of faith; yet we are afraid, that what a great man ſaid upon another occaſion, concerning reaſon, may be applied to the preſent purpoſe, "That ſeldom any "are againſt Confeſſions, but when Confeſſions "are againſt them."

Beſides what we have now obſerved, there are many whoſe opinions in other matters influence their notions concerning Confeſſions, and determine them to treat works of this nature as uſeleſs if not hurtful compoſures; ſuch as thoſe who maintain, that the diſbelief of any particular doctrines is no great hindrance to the eternal happineſs of a perſon, provided he live up to his knowledge, and act agreeably to his ſentiments; and who ſtretch their charity ſo far, as to think that men of all the parties of Chriſtianity, or even of any of the different religions which prevail in the world, may have an almoſt equal claim to the favour of God, and be ſaved according to the different methods of religion which they embrace; all which perſons muſt naturally deſpiſe Confeſſions of Faith, the very being whereof is founded upon the abſolute neceſſity or vaſt importance of the belief of ſome articles, in order to a perſon's being admitted to the communion of the church, or at leaſt received as a public teacher in it.

And as the doctrine of religion is of ſmall moment with them, all the means of preſerving its purity, and any ties whereby men can be bound to maintain it, muſt appear inſignificant and arbitrary; nor will they be at pains to keep a guard upon that, the loſing of which they imagine to be of ſo ſmall conſequence: and therefore the Socinians and others, whoſe charity in matters of ſpeculation

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tion is ſo widely extenſive, look with an unfavourable eye upon creeds, and become naturally enemies to them. Nor do we believe it will be found an ill-grounded obſervation, that in proportion to a perſon's zeal for the doctrines of Chriſtianity, and his opinion of the neceſſity and excellency of divine truths, his eſteem of Confeſſions will riſe or fall.

As the Arminians do not ſeem to think an agreement in doctrine of ſo great moment to a Chriſtian ſociety, nor are ſo ſenſibly affected with matters of belief only, they alſo are no great friends to Confeſſions, but generally favour a latitude in things of that nature. Beſides which, the condemnation of their opinions by the ſynod of Dort, and the hard treatment which they thought they then met with, fretted their minds, and augmented their prejudices againſt creeds of every kind, and the councils which framed them; and therefore we find, that not only the learned Epiſcopius, but the body of the Remonſtrants in the preface to their Confeſſion, though they allow them to be ſometimes uſeful upon other accounts, inveigh bitterly againſt them as a teſt of orthodoxy, and a boundary within the limits of which the paſtors of the church ſhould be confined in their adminiſtrations.

Confeſſions of Faith are alſo no leſs eagerly oppoſed by thoſe who are enemies to all government of the church, independent upon, or diſtinct from that of the ſtate; and would either entirely aboliſh that order which is diſtinguiſhed by the name of clergy, or at moſt allow them nothing but what is derived from the civil magiſtrate, and would give the ſame riſe and nature to their office with any other part of the conſtitution of the commonwealth. Such libertines bear a natural grudge at Confeſſions, in common with every thing that is in

in any reſpect eccleſiaſtical, and pour the ſame contempt upon them which they do on the miniſtry itſelf, and all the inſtitutions of the church; beſides that it may be juſtly ſuſpected, that the moſt zealous advocates of this party are really Deiſts, diſtinguiſhed with a thin maſk of Chriſtianity; and therefore no wonder that they ſtrive, by all the arts they are maſters of, to run down any method of preſerving in their purity the doctrines of our holy religion, and preventing the ſpreading of diviſion and hereſy. The moſt celebrated performance of this kind ſeems to be, *The rights of the Chriſtian church*; the authors of which beſtow a ſufficient ſhare of their wit and ſatire upon this deſign of Confeſſions which we are now treating of.

Were theſe the only enemies which creeds had to deal with, there would not be ſo great cauſe to fear the iſſue of the conteſt; and our church, which ſtill remains perſuaded of their uſefulneſs and neceſſity, would be eaſy in a diſpute where they had only to ſtruggle with the common enemies of Chriſtianity. But it were extremely unjuſt to affirm, that all the oppoſition which we find Confeſſions meet with, flows from theſe impure ſprings of a ſecret infidelity, or at leaſt a cold unconcernedneſs about the doctrines of Chriſtianity; and it muſt be acknowledged, that perſons of a quite different complexion, and who are moved by reaſons not ſo inconſiſtent with a love to truth, and a ſincere value for religion, have conſpired in the deſign of aboliſhing all creeds, and human teſts of orthodoxy.

Many whom in charity we are bound to believe endowed with real goodneſs, by a miſtaken fondneſs for the truly noble Proteſtant principles of liberty and private judgement, and by a miſled zeal for the honour of divine revelation, and the peculiar

culiar authority of the holy ſcriptures, and by other reaſons of the like nature, have been inſenſibly determined to entertain very unfavourable ſentiments of creeds, which they thought were ſcarcely reconcileable with the ſacred prerogatives of the Bible, and the privileges of a Chriſtian, and were afraid could not miſs to be attended with very unhappy conſequences; though, no doubt, ſuch plauſible prejudices againſt Confeſſions have, upon other accounts, found an eaſier paſſage into the minds of thoſe who, being diſſenters from eſtabliſhed churches, are, as we noticed above, naturally averſe to an authority which they are not maſters of, or of ſuch in the eſtabliſhment as are conſcious of their having departed from the public doctrine of the church, and embraced opinions inconſiſtent with its articles.

Such prejudices againſt Confeſſions have mightily prevailed of late amongſt the Engliſh Diſſenters, and many have been impreſſed thereby, as appears particularly by ſo great a number's having, on the occaſion of a late unhappy event, zealouſly declared their opinion, that no aſſent to any human forms ſhould be required as a term of Chriſtian or miniſterial communion; that the truths of divine revelation ſhould be expreſſed only in the words and phraſes of the holy ſcriptures, and that all other teſts of orthodoxy ſhould be entirely laid aſide.

The ſame thoughts of Confeſſions ſeem alſo to be entertained by thoſe of the church of England who are the moſt zealous advocates for liberty, and claim a juſt ſhare of our eſteem for their unwearied labours in defence of ſo glorious a cauſe, and their heroic oppoſition to civil or eccleſiaſtical tyranny. Several of the moſt noted miniſters and celebrated authors in Geneva and Switzer-

land, ſuch as the younger Turretine, Oſtervald, and Werenſelſius, may perhaps be reckoned of the ſame party, and appear plainly enough to have received very different notions of Confeſſions from what thoſe churches formerly entertained.

There are a great many paſſages in ſeveral authors which touch this queſtion; but, ſo far as we have had occaſion to know, it is moſt directly handled, and the arguments againſt creeds are moſt plauſibly repreſented, by the Remonſtrants in the preface to their Confeſſion, and Epiſcopius's Defence of it; by an anonymous writing, intitled, *De pace eccleſiæ reſtituenda conſilium*, publiſhed by Le Clerk in his *Bibliotheque choiſie*, tom. 7. p. 401; by *The Rights of the Chriſtian church*; and, principally, by the ingenious author of the *Occaſional Paper*, vol. 2. numb. 1. *Of Orthodoxy*; where that matter is diſcourſed of with the greateſt ſtrength, or rather ſpecioufneſs of argument, and the beautifulleſt embelliſhments of wit and language, as well as with the keeneſt edge of ſatire; and where, at the ſame time that creeds are expoſed in the ſevereſt manner, a regard is ſtill maintained for religion, and ſacred matters are treated with a becoming decency and reverence.

And indeed this is what affects us in the moſt ſenſible manner, that in defending the uſe our church makes of her Confeſſion, we have to deal with friends as well as enemies, and are obliged to enter the liſts with thoſe with whom we agree almoſt in every thing elſe, and yet diſagree ſo unfortunately about the neceſſary methods of maintaining the purity of that faith for which we all pretend an equal regard.

II. THAT we may give our readers a full and impartial view of this matter, and do all the juſtice

ſtice we are able to thoſe from whom we find ourſelves obliged to differ, we ſhall, as ſhortly as may be, repreſent the grounds upon which the clamour that hath of late been made againſt Confeſſions is raiſed, and the reaſons which have determined many learned and ſober men to form notions ſo much to their diſadvantage. Nor ſhall we willingly diſſemble any thing that may juſtify the violent oppoſition made to articles of faith, or may tend to render the arguments againſt them either more convincing or more plauſible.

They think, then, that any teſts of orthodoxy of human compoſure ſeem inconſiſtent with that noble fundamental principle of the Reformation, the abſolute perfection and ſufficiency of the holy ſcriptures to all the purpoſes of truth and ſalvation; and that it is in the ſacred writings alone we can find the genuine doctrines of Chriſtianity, where they are expreſſed with a juſt extent and perſpicuity; and, therefore, any other forms of doctrine become abſolutely uſeleſs. They think, that no phraſes can be ſo well adapted to the nature of divine things, or calculated to preſerve the purity of religion, as thoſe which the Holy Ghoſt inſpiring the ſacred writers hath thought fit to uſe; and that therefore the forming creeds, conſiſting of the words of mens wiſdom, is a notorious diſreſpect to the ſacred writings, and inconſiſtent with that high eſteem and veneration which ſhould be paid them; and it argues a preſumptuous confidence, as if men could deviſe expreſſions that are more proper or clearer than thoſe of the ſacred oracles; or as if the purity of faith could be better maintained by human inventions than by a ſteady adherence to the only rule of our faith, and by thinking and ſpeaking as it does. It ſeems to be an evident encroachment upon the authority of the Bible, to ſet up ſubordinate rules

of

of faith, which ſhall ſhare with it in the deciding of controverſies, and be appealed to as a touch-ſtone of truth; and that, with whatever fair colourings ſuch a pretence may be varniſhed over, it really undermines the foundations of our religion, tends to create in the people a diſeſteem and neglect of the ſcriptures, to make them build their faith upon a human model, and form their judgement of others, not by the conformity of their ſentiments to divine revelation, but by their implicit aſſent to the eſtabliſhed creeds; upon which account, thoſe who are zealous for the honour of divine revelation, cannot fail to apprehend the diſmal conſequences of pretenſions ſo injurious to it, and look down with anger and contempt upon its unworthy rivals.

The very frame and deſign of Confeſſions ſeem to them alſo to be an invaſion upon the rights of mankind, and the liberties of a Chriſtian, by which every perſon hath a title to examine, impartially all doctrines propoſed to him, and then judge for himſelf, eſpecially in matters of eternal importance, and which reſpect a religion, that not only allows, but commands, the ſtricteſt inquiry into all the parts of it; and which can never ſubſiſt without a freedom of thought, and a rational choice. No man, therefore, or ſociety of men, have authority to judge for another, and compoſe ſyſtems of doctrines to which they can demand his aſſent. And as ſuch a claim is aſſuming and arbitrary, ſo it is mean and inglorious in a Chriſtian to ſubmit to it, and, contrary to the commands of his heavenly maſter, to call any man *Rabbi* upon earth: "And he who yields his neck to this "yoke eaſily, betrays and gives up the moſt va-"luable and unalienable right of a reaſonable "creature, to think for himſelf, ſee with his "own eyes, and in every matter to judge accor-

" ding to the beſt light he can get of the true " merits of a cauſe *."

It appears to them alſo, that the authority claimed, even by the Proteſtant Confeſſions of Faith, is bottomed upon the ſame foundation on which the church of Rome hath erected ſo exorbitant a domination, and ſupported by the like pretences; and that all creeds gradually tend to the ſame execrable tyranny uſurped by that church; that it is extremely hard to conceive what ſubmiſſion can be required to any human compoſures, without eſtabliſhing them into rules of faith, and laying a foundation for their being exalted to the ſame high place that is invaded by the Papal decrees: That this hath been the conſtant tendency of ſuch compoſures, and an elevation they aſpired to, and that all the plauſible diſtinctions that were made by their abettors, and the modeſt and fair appearances they might put on at the beginning, ſerved only to impoſe upon the weakneſs of the people, and make attempts of this kind more dangerous.

For, as the learned Epiſcopius tells us, " The " devil knows that tyranny is univerſally abhor- " red by mankind, and therefore he is too cun- " ning to attempt the barefaced promoting of it, " He more artfully ſlips in by undiſcerned chinks, " and gradually winds himſelf into a ſtation to " which he could not make his way by the " ſtraight road. Firſt, he perſuades men, in or- " der to preſerve the purity of doctrine, to com- " poſe Confeſſions about matters that are not ab- " ſolutely neceſſary to be known or believed, and " thus far the affair goes on eaſily. Then he ur- " ges a conſent to theſe articles as a bond of peace " and union. Good ſtill! Next, meaſures muſt be

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 9.

" taken

" taken that this conſent be kept inviolable. This " alſo is ſpecious enough, and is an encourage- " ment to farther advances; therefore he loudly " cries up the neceſſity of forms and creeds to be " ſubſcribed, ſo as not only a conſent, but a per- " ſeverance in that conſent, may be promiſed. " And this is the firſt viſible ſtep to the tyranny " of men, and tyrannical Confeſſions of Faith. " By this way, it is not hard for the devil to a- " ſcend to the higheſt elevation of tyranny; eſpe- " cially if ſuch a creed be venerable for its anti- " quity, and, unſhaken, hath outbraved many " perſecutions; if it hath been ſtoutly defended " againſt adverſaries, and be fortified and recom- " mended by the blood of martyrs who adhered " to it; all theſe are ſupports and helps by which " the devil makes way for eſtabliſhing the moſt " ambitious aims of human authority."

And as the power graſped at by the church of Rome is of the moſt fatal conſequence to the li- berties of mankind, and overthrows the moſt eſ- ſential principles of all religion, they are juſtly zealous of the leaſt approaches to it, and are per- ſuaded they ought to guard againſt the firſt ap- pearances of that monſtrous power, and there- fore abandon all human creeds, the authority whereof they think looks that way.

Upon this account alſo, they think, that thoſe Proteſtants which impoſe ſuch Confeſſions upon any man, are ſtill more inexcuſable than the Papiſts: " And that men who ſeparate from the church of " Rome on the foot of a private judgement; that " pretend to no infallibility, and own the Bible to " be a perfect adequate rule, that needs no addi- " tions to eke it out, and make it a complete direc- " tory; that men that live and breathe upon this " principle, and can juſtify their own conduct by " nothing elſe; that they, while they are engaged

" in a pretended defiance to this implicit faith, " ſhould yet make their own ſentiments and dar- " ling opinions the ſtandard of truth and ortho- " doxy, is both an iniquity and a folly not to be " endured *."

It is to be obſerved alſo, in their opinion, that Confeſſions are only engines of force and power; that they are framed by ſuch as are uppermoſt, ſubſervient to their own ſchemes and deſigns, and muſt always follow the dictates and notions of the majority, upon whom error and fancy have generally a ſtronger influence than truth and reaſon, and therefore ſeem of very little weight in determining a queſtion, and extremely unfit tools to promote the intereſt of truth and freedom. They hinder men from an impartial inquiry, and prepoſſeſs their minds with prejudices. They naturally beget in their admirers a mean, narrow, and confined turn of thought, and contract all his faculties of reaſoning within the little bounds of a ſyſtem, or a creed made to his hand. They are the greateſt diſcouragement to learning and advances in knowledge, by the hardſhips which they expoſe any to that ſhall dare to make further progreſs than his neighbours in the diſcoveries of truth, or recede from the old maxims. They make men afraid of rectifying their miſtakes, and hinder them from an unbiaſſed ſearch, leſt thereby they ſhould find the falſehood or uncertainty of any article of a creed which they have obliged themſelves to maintain: " And thus they are the greateſt enemy, " and the moſt effectual impediment, to the ma- " king or publiſhing any new diſcoveries, how " important, demonſtrable, or uſeful ſoever they " be. They are a noble ſecurity againſt growing " wiſer than thoſe who went before us †."

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 15. † Ib. p. 14.

Such

Such creeds appear alſo to them to give their votaries little and unworthy notions of Chriſtianity, and of church-communion, and to make them confine theſe within the limits of their own party and ſchemes, and ſo tend to beget in them a ſour, uncharitable, perſecuting diſpoſition; to inſpire them with rage and fiercenes againſt thoſe who differ from them, and an impatience of the leaſt contradiction, and ſo inflame their paſſions, as to make them deaf to all conſideration and cool thought. They breed in men a haughty and imperious temper, and feed them with the fancy that every man ſhould think as they do, and thereby foment hatred and animoſities, till at length men arrive at the inſolence to uſurp the judgement-ſeat of Chriſt, and excommunicate and anathematize all thoſe who diſagree with them, and thereby they are of a ſpirit entirely oppoſite to the genius of Chriſtianity, and counteract the great deſign of it. They have a fatal tendency to extinguiſh theſe noble virtues of our religion, an unbounded love, a diffuſive charity, a mutual forbearance, and a management of all differences and diſputes with meekneſs, humility, and an openneſs of mind; and that therefore they are of the moſt dangerous conſequence to the peace and happineſs of mankind, and a ſcandal to our holy profeſſion, and ſeem abſolutely inconconſiſtent with the Apoſtle's rule, Phil. iii. 15. 16. "Let us therefore, as many "as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any "thing ye be otherwiſe minded, God ſhall reveal "even this unto you. Nevertheleſs, whereto we "have already attained, let us walk by the ſame "rule, let us mind the ſame thing."

It may be alledged alſo, that ſuch teſts of orthodoxy, and determinations of councils, are extremely prejudicial to the intereſts of goodneſs and holineſs among their admirers. They make them

nauſeate

nauſeate practical religion, and fill their heads with airy ſchemes of a fruitleſs ſpeculation, and divert them from the main buſineſs of Chriſtianity. Such love naturally to be more employed in matters of doubtful diſputation, than in a ſincere obedience to the laws of the goſpel, and a regular government of their paſſions and appetites. They come eaſily to depend upon their ſuppoſed orthodoxy, and make up with it the want of more valuable qualities; and thus a contentious zeal, a dogmatical ſtiffneſs of opinion, a ſour and ſcornful uſage of others, with a proud and uncharitable ſpirit of impoſition and anathematizing, fill the room of all the noble and amiable graces of religion.

They think further, that their notions of the nature and tendency of creeds is juſtified by the hiſtory of the church in all ages; which ſhows that they have been the ſprings and the fomenters of numberleſs diviſions and diſorders, whereby the church hath been torn to pieces, and true religion entirely loſt amongſt the fierce combatants; that they have been often framed to entangle the conſciences of mankind, to ſtifle truth and light, and ſerve the worſt and baſeſt purpoſes; that cunning and ambitious men have made uſe of them as engines to ſerve their luſt of power, their avarice, and their cruelty; and have framed them ſo as to exclude from any influence in church or ſtate thoſe whoſe eminent qualities they apprehended gave them a better title than themſelves to the eſteem of the public; that there have been numberleſs examples, where, by the help of theſe teſts of orthodoxy, ignorant, revengeful, and ſelf-conceited perſons, have overclouded the brighteſt merit, and oppreſſed the loveliеſt virtues; and, inſtead of a real zeal for truth, have thence taken occaſion to gratify their paſſions, and raiſe their reputations

reputations with a blind multitude upon the ruins of the beſt men and Chriſtians: in a word, that, in order to a forcing an aſſent to ſuch human compoſures, the bloodieſt perſecutions have been raiſed, and incredible numbers ſacrificed for a trifle; that as theſe melancholy effects ſoon appeared in the church, ſo the diſeaſe ſtill increaſed, and no bounds were ſet to the humour of creed-making.

For in the firſt ages different councils met, and poſitive deciſions were haſtily made about opinions of no moment, contradictory to one another, and frequently on both ſides to common ſenſe; and yet they diſputed them with an invincible obſtinacy, and impoſed them upon one another with the utmoſt violence; which was often attended with a mutual hatred, and *Anathema's*, to the utter diſtraction of the church, and neglect of the great duties of our religion. For to ſo low an ebb was Chriſtianity reduced by theſe methods, that peace, and love, and charity, were offered as a victim to ſo airy and contemptible a thing as the day of the celebration of Eaſter: nor was there any thing ſo inſignificant, but at length doctors came to wrangle about it, and councils to decide and impoſe it: and, with the loſs of meekneſs and forbearance, the ſubſtantial truths of the goſpel were changed into inactive lifeleſs ſchemes; and religion dwindled into thin ſubtilties, and intangled intricacies. To remedy all theſe evils, they think the only way is, to adhere cloſely to the ſcriptures, and reject all human compoſures as teſts of orthodoxy; to expreſs divine truths only in the words of the inſpired writers, and ſecure to every man the liberty of private judgement.

In ſuch a caſe they flatter themſelves we ſhould ſoon ſee a happy change on the face of things: religion would flouriſh, an univerſal love would diffuſe itſelf, and peace and virtue again revive; moderation

moderation would be the ornament of a diſpute, and minds that were united by charity and good-will would ſooner arrive at a harmony of ſentiments alſo; or at leaſt differences in ſpeculation would not be attended with ſo black a train of miſchiefs, nor baniſh away practical goodneſs; freedom of thought and learning would be encouraged, and advances made in every part of knowledge; truth would not be oppreſſed by power, nor the underſtandings of mankind fettered in ſhackles of human forging.

III. THUS we have repreſented the chief things which may be brought to ſupport the ſentiments of thoſe who are declared enemies to Confeſſions; which we thought neceſſary, in order to give impartial light to the controverſy; and have been ſo far from diſguiſing any thing that is plauſibly ſaid by thoſe who differ from us, that, on the contrary, we have endeavoured to give their cauſe all the ſtrength that ſo narrow a compaſs could admit of. And it muſt be acknowledged, that theſe reaſonings are extremely plauſible: and they may in ſome meaſure excuſe the oppoſition made to creeds, though they cannot juſtify it: for we hope it will appear, that the practice of our church at leaſt is perfectly conſiſtent with the honour of the ſcriptures, and the liberties of mankind; that it hath none of the alledged pernicious conſequences, but is in many reſpects neceſſary and advantageous; and that the objections we have mentioned, ſtrike only againſt thoſe who abuſe Confeſſions, or flow from an unacquaintedneſs with the juſt foundations upon which any church may require an aſſent to ſuch forms of doctrine: ſo that the adverſaries to creeds ſtrive to aboliſh what they ſhould only reform; and, inſtead of rectifying abuſes,

uſes, deſtroy theſe forms, and unhinge all order and government.

Before we endeavour to defend the management of our church is this affair, it will not be improper to ſtate the matter of fact, which will be beſt done by the following acts of parliament and aſſembly relating hereto.

ACTS OF PARLIAMENT.

Will. & Mary, parl. 1. ſeſſ. 2. act. 5.

Act ratifying the Confeſſion of Faith, and ſettling Preſbyterian church-government.

OUR Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majeſties, and three Eſtates of Parliament, conceiving it to be their bound duty, after the great deliverance that God hath lately wrought for this church and kingdom, in the firſt place, to ſettle and ſecure therein the true Proteſtant religion, according to the truth of God's word, as it hath of a long time been profeſſed within this land; as alſo the government of Chriſt's church within this nation, agreeable to the word of God, and moſt conducive to the advancement of true piety and godlineſs, and the eſtabliſhing of peace and tranquillity within this realm; and that by an article of the claim of right, it is declared, "That "Prelacy, and the ſuperiority of any office in the "church above preſbyters, is, and hath been, a "great and unſupportable grievance and trouble "to this nation, and contrary to the inclinations "of the generality of the people, ever ſince the "Reformation, they having reformed from Pope-"ry by preſbyters, and therefore ought to be a-"boliſhed;" likeas, by an act of the laſt ſeſſion of this parliament, prelacy is aboliſhed:

Therefore

Therefore their Majeſties, with advice and conſent of the ſaid three Eſtates, do hereby revive, ratify, and perpetually confirm, all laws, ſtatutes, and acts of parliament, made againſt Popery and Papiſts, and for the maintenance and preſervation of the true Reformed Proteſtant religion, and for the true church of Chriſt, within this kingdom, in ſo far as they confirm the ſame, or are made in favour thereof. Likeas they, by theſe preſents, ratify and eſtabliſh the Confeſſion of Faith, now read in their preſence, and voted and approven by them as the public and avowed Confeſſion of this church, containing the ſum and ſubſtance of the doctrine of the Reformed churches.

As alſo they do eſtabliſh, ratify, and confirm, the Preſbyterian church government and diſcipline; that is to ſay, the government of the church by kirk-ſeſſions, preſbyteries, provincial ſynods, and general aſſemblies, ratified and eſtabliſhed by the 114th act, Ja. VI. parl. 12. *anno* 1592, intitled, *Ratification of the liberty of the true kirk*, &c. and thereafter received, by the general conſent of this nation, to be the only government of Chriſt's church within this kingdom; reviving, renewing, and confirming, the foreſaid act of parliament. ——

Will. & Mary, parl. 1. ſeſſ. 4. act 22.

Act for ſettling the quiet and peace of the church.

Our Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majeſties, with advice and conſent of the Eſtates of Parliament, ratify, approve, and perpetually confirm, the fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of this current parliament, intitled, *Act ratifying the Confeſſion of Faith, and ſettling Preſbyterian church-*

church-government, in the whole heads, articles, and clauſes thereof.

And do further ſtatute and ordain, That no perſon be admitted, or continued for hereafter, to be a miniſter or preacher within this church, unleſs that he —— ſubſcribe the Confeſſion of Faith, ratified in the foreſaid fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of this parliament, declaring the ſame to be the Confeſſion of his Faith, and that he owns the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which he will conſtantly adhere to; and likewiſe, that he owns and acknowledges Preſbyterian church-government, as ſettled by the foreſaid fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of this parliament, to be the only government of this church; and that he will ſubmit thereto, and concur therewith, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion thereof.

And their Majeſties, with advice and conſent foreſaid, ſtatute and ordain, That uniformity of worſhip, and of the adminiſtration of all public ordinances within this church, be obſerved by all the ſaid miniſters and preachers, as the ſamen are at preſent performed, and allowed therein, or ſhall be hereafter declared by the authority of the ſame; and that no miniſter or preacher be admitted, or continued for hereafter, unleſs that he ſubſcribe to obſerve, and do actually obſerve, the foreſaid uniformity. ——

Will. & Mary, parl. 1. ſeſſ. 2. act 17.

Act for viſitation of univerſities, colleges, and ſchools.

OUR Sovereign Lord and Lady, the King and Queen's Majeſties, and the three Eſtates of Parliament, conſidering how neceſſary it is for the

advancement of religion and learning, and for the good of the church, and peace of the kingdom, that the univerſities, colleges, and ſchools, be provided and ſerved with pious, able, and qualified profeſſors, principals, regents, maſters, and others bearing office therein, well affected to their Majeſties, and the eſtabliſhed government of church and ſtate: Therefore their Majeſties, with advice of the ſaid three Eſtates of Parliament, do ſtatute, ordain, and enact, That from this time forth, no profeſſors, principals, regents, maſters, or others bearing office in any univerſity, college, or ſchool, within this kingdom, be either admitted or allowed to continue in the exerciſe of their ſaid functions, but ſuch as do acknowledge and profeſs, and ſhall ſubſcribe to the Confeſſion of Faith, ratified and approven by this preſent parliament. ——

The fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of K. William and Q. Mary is ratified by the ſecond act, ſeſſ. 8. K. William, and by the third act of Q. Anne 1702, and by the ſecond act of the firſt ſeſſion of the firſt parliament Q. Anne.

Q. Anne, parl. 1. ſeſſ. 4. act 6.

Act for ſecuring the Proteſtant religion, and Preſbyterian church-government.

—— Her Majeſty, with advice and conſent of the ſaid Eſtates of Parliament, doth hereby eſtabliſh and confirm the true Proteſtant religion, and the worſhip, diſcipline, and government of this church, to continue without any alteration to the people of this land, in all ſucceeding generations: And more eſpecially, her Majeſty, with advice

and conſent foreſaid, ratifies, approves, and for ever confirms, the fifth act of the ſecond ſeſſion of the firſt parliament of King William and Queen Mary, intitled, *Act ratifying the Confeſſion of Faith, and ſettling Preſbyterian church-government*, with the haill other acts of parliament relating thereto, in proſecution of the declaration of the eſtates of this kingdom, containing the claim of right, bearing date the eleventh of April, one thouſand ſix hundred and eighty-nine.

And her Majeſty, with advice and conſent foreſaid, expreſsly provides and declares, That the foreſaid true Proteſtant religion contained in the above-mentioned Confeſſion of Faith, with the form and purity of worſhip preſently in uſe within this church, and its Preſbyterian church-government and diſcipline, that is to ſay, the government of the church by kirk-ſeſſions, preſbyteries, provincial ſynods, and general aſſemblies, all eſtabliſhed by the foreſaid acts of parliament, purſuant to the claim of right, ſhall remain and continue unalterable; and that the ſaid Preſbyterian government ſhall be the only government of the church within the kingdom of Scotland.

And further, for the greater ſecurity of the foreſaid Proteſtant religion, and of the worſhip, diſcipline, and government, of this church, as above eſtabliſhed, her Majeſty, with advice and conſent foreſaid, ſtatutes and ordains, That the univerſities and colleges of St Andrew's, Glaſgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, as now eſtabliſhed by law, ſhall continue within this kingdom for ever; and that in all time coming, no profeſſors, principals, regents, maſters, or others bearing office, in any univerſity, college, or ſchool, within this kingdom, be capable, or be admitted, or allowed to continue in the exerciſe of their ſaid functions, but ſuch as ſhall own and acknowledge the civil

government, in manner preſcribed, or to be pre-preſcribed, by the acts of parliament: As alſo, that, before or at their admiſſions, they do and ſhall acknowledge and profeſs, and ſhall ſubſcribe to the foreſaid Confeſſion of Faith, as the Confeſſion of their Faith; and that they will practiſe and conform themſelves to the worſhip preſently in uſe in this church, and ſubmit themſelves to the government and diſcipline thereof, and never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or ſubverſion of the ſame, and that before the reſpective preſbyteries of the bounds, by whatſoever gift, preſentation, or proviſion, they may be thereto provided.

And further, her Majeſty, with advice foreſaid, expreſsly declares and ſtatutes, That none of the ſubjects of this kingdom ſhall be liable to, but all and every one of them for ever free of any oath, teſt, or ſubſcription, within this kingdom, contrary to, or inconſiſtent with, the foreſaid true Proteſtant religion, and Preſbyterian church-government, worſhip, and diſcipline, as above eſtabliſhed; and that the ſame, within the bounds of this church and kingdom, ſhall never be impoſed upon, or required of them in any ſort.

And laſtly, That after the deceaſe of her preſent Majeſty, (whom God long preſerve), the Sovereign ſucceeding to her in the royal government of the kingdom of Great Britain, ſhall, in all time coming, at his or her acceſſion to the crown, ſwear and ſubſcribe, that they ſhall inviolably maintain and preſerve the foreſaid ſettlement of the true Proteſtant religion, with the government, worſhip, diſcipline, rights, and privileges, of this church, as above eſtabliſhed by the laws of this kingdom, in proſecution of the claim of right.

And

And it is hereby ſtatute and ordained, That this act of parliament, with the eſtabliſhment therein contained, ſhall be held and obſerved in all time coming as a fundamental and eſſential condition of any treaty or union to be concluded betwixt the two kingdoms, without any alteration thereof, or derogation thereto, in any ſort, for ever: As alſo that this act of parliament, and ſettlement therein contained, ſhall be inſert and repeated in any act of parliament that ſhall paſs, for agreeing and concluding the foreſaid treaty or union betwixt the two kingdoms; and that the ſame ſhall be therein expreſsly declared to be a fundamental and eſſential condition of the ſaid treaty or union in all time coming.

Accordingly this act is declared to be a fundamental and eſſential condition of the union, and inſerted in the act of parliament of Scotland, intitled, *An act ratifying and approving the treaty of union of the two kingdoms of Scotland and England*; and in the act of the parliament of England, intitled, *An act for an union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland.* —— And on the 22d day of September 1714, his Majeſty, in his firſt general council, did take and ſubſcribe the following oath.

"I GEORGE, King of Great Britain, France, "and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. do "faithfully promiſe and ſwear, That I ſhall in- "violably maintain and preſerve the ſettlement of "the true Proteſtant religion, with the govern- "ment, worſhip, diſcipline, rights, and privileges, "of the church of Scotland, as eſtabliſhed by the "laws made there, in proſecution of the claim of "right; and particularly by an act, intitled, *Act* "*for ſecuring the Proteſtant religion, and Preſby-*

" *terian church government*, and by the acts paſſed " in the parliaments of both kingdoms for union " of the two kingdoms. So help me God.

" GEORGE REX."

ACTS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

Aſſembly 1690, act 7.

For retaining ſoundneſs and unity of doctrine.

THE General Aſſembly appoints, That all probationers licenſed to preach, all intrants into the miniſtry, and all other miniſters and elders received into communion with us in church government, be obliged to ſubſcribe their approbation of the Confeſſion of Faith, approven by former General Aſſemblies of this church, and ratified in the ſecond ſeſſion of the current parliament. And they recommend this to the diligence of the ſeveral preſbyteries; and appoint them to record their diligence thereanent in their reſpective regiſters.

Aſſembly 1700, act 11.

Act anent ſubſcribing the Confeſſion of Faith.

THE General Aſſembly appoints, that all miniſters and ruling elders belonging to this national church ſubſcribe the *Confeſſion of Faith*, as the Confeſſion of their Faith, according to the act of Aſſembly 1690, and the *Formula* agreed upon in the Aſſembly held in the year 1694, act 11. § 6.

The

The Formula.

" I do ſincerely own and declare the " above Confeſſion of Faith, approven by former " General Aſſemblies of this church, and ratified " by law in the year 1690, to be the Confeſſion " of my Faith; and that I own the doctrine there- " in contained to be the true doctrine, which I " will conſtantly adhere to. As likewiſe, that I " own and acknowledge Preſbyterian church-go- " vernment of this church, now ſettled by law, " by kirk-ſeſſions, preſbyteries, provincial ſynods, " and general aſſemblies, to be the only govern- " ment of this church; and that I will ſubmit " thereto, concur therewith, and never endea- " vour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or " ſubverſion thereof; and that I ſhall obſerve " uniformity of worſhip, and of the adminiſtra- " tion of all public ordinances within this church, " as the ſame are at preſent performed and al- " lowed."

Formula to be ſubſcribed by all ſuch as ſhall paſs trials in order to be licenſed, and that ſhall be ordained miniſters, or admitted to pariſhes. By the 10th act of the Aſſembly 1711.

" I do hereby declare, That I do " ſincerely own and believe the whole doctrine " contained in the Confeſſion of Faith, approven " by the General Aſſemblies of this national " church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, " and frequently confirmed by divers acts of par- " liament ſince that time, to be the truths of " God; and I do own the ſame as the Confeſſion " of my Faith: As likewiſe I do own the purity " of worſhip preſently authoriſed and practiſed in

" this

" this church; and alſo the Preſbyterian govern-
" ment and diſcipline now ſo happily eſtabliſhed
" therein; which doctrine, worſhip, and church-
" government, I am perſuaded, are founded up-
" on the word of God, and agreeable thereto:
" and I promiſe, that, through the grace of God,
" I ſhall firmly and conſtantly adhere to the
" ſame; and, to the utmoſt of my power, ſhall,
" in my ſtation, aſſert, maintain, and defend the
" ſaid doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, and govern-
" ment of this church, by kirk-ſeſſions, preſby-
" teries, provincial ſynods, and general aſſem-
" blies; and that I ſhall, in my practice, conform
" myſelf to the ſaid worſhip, and ſubmit to the
" ſaid diſcipline and government, and never en-
" deavour, directly nor indirectly, the prejudice
" or ſubverſion of the ſame. And I promiſe,
" that I ſhall follow no diviſive courſe from the
" preſent eſtabliſhment in this church; renoun-
" cing all doctrines, tenets, and opinions whatſo-
" ever, contrary to, or inconſiſtent with, the ſaid
" doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline, or goverment, of
" this church."

III. THERE might be ſeveral different methods taken in order to vindicate this uſe which our church makes of her Confeſſion. The account which the holy ſcriptures gives us of the conſtitution of the church, and of the duty of its rulers; the obligations which they are laid under to maintain and propagate the truth, to preſerve the doctrine of Chriſtianity in its original ſimplicity and purity, and guard the church from being infected by the contagion of error, to reſiſt gainſayers, and reject obſtinate heretics; the authority of diſcipline, and the native deſign of eccleſiaſtical cenſures, together with the right which eccleſiaſtical officers have to employ the neceſſary means for attaining

taining theſe valuable ends, might all be improved to good purpoſe in the defence of Confeſſions.

But becauſe the ſupporting them upon this foundation would neceſſarily engage us in many intricate queſtions about church-government, and the nature and extent of the authority wherewith its rulers are inveſted, whoſe very being is denied by many, who confidently affirm, that there can be no government but that of the ſtate, and diſclaim any proper eccleſiaſtical conſtitution diſtinct from the civil; and ſince there are innumerable diſputes raiſed by learned men, concerning the meaſures and the uſes of that power wherewith ſynods and councils are endued by the laws of Chriſt; we ſhall entirely wave the conſideration of matters, the clearing and eſtabliſhing of which would be inconſiſtent with the nature and deſign of this preface; and, inſtead of this method of defence, ſhall eſſay to prove, that the church of Scotland, when obliging all her miniſters, and other eccleſiaſtical officers, to ſubſcribe her Confeſſion of Faith, does nothing but what ſhe hath a juſt title to by the common principles of reaſon, and the natural unalienable rights of mankind; and as we may afterwards have opportunity to conſider any obligation which our church is ſuppoſed to bring all her members under to her articles of faith, our reaſoning at this time will chiefly regard the public officers of the church, and the ties whereby they are bound to her Confeſſion.

As it is not deſigned upon this occaſion to compoſe a complete treatiſe upon this ſubject, we ſhall lay before our readers the principles upon which a larger vindication of creeds may be built, and ſuch obſervations as, it is hoped, may be ſufficient to anſwer the moſt plauſible objections againſt them, in that natural unconfined manner which eſſays of this kind have a claim to, without pretending

tending to obſerve the forms of an elaborate method; only thus far we ſhall endeavour to range our thoughts in a diſtinct order; as, *firſt*, to mention the general foundation upon which any church may require ſubſcriptions to public Formula's by her miniſters; *next*, to conſider the principal arguments which the enemies to creeds boaſt of for their ſtrength and importance; *after* which we ſhall account for the reaſons which moved our church to make uſe of the rights ſhe hath to require ſuch an aſſent to her Confeſſion, and the manifold advantages and great neceſſity of this practice.

1. As freedom is the birthright of mankind, any number of perſons may voluntarily unite themſelves, to ſuch purpoſes, and under ſuch regulations, as appear uſeful and convenient to them, provided they be agreeable to the rights of others, and the rules of juſtice. Nor could any foreigner pretend to intrude himſelf into a ſociety which is founded upon conſent, or uſurp the management of its concerns.

Religion is the brighteſt glory of rational creatures, and their moſt important buſineſs; it diffuſes itſelf through all the circumſtances and conditions of life, and is founded in our very beings: wherefore, in all the relations which men can be placed in, a regard to our maker ſhou'd exert itſelf, and they ought all to be improved for that purpoſe; nor can a perſon be conſidered in any ſtate, either of ſolitude or ſociety, but it ſhould appear that he is a religious creature. This then is the nobleſt ſpring of union amongſt men, and that ſociety is bound together by the greateſt tie, which is deſigned for the honour and ſervice of God. It muſt be therefore infinitely reaſonable, that mankind ſhould unite together in worſhip-

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ping aſſemblies, join in a body for the praiſes and adoration of their common lord and maker, and entertain communion and fellowſhip with one another as his people. And as we are led by the light of nature to form ſocieties for theſe excellent purpoſes, ſo we are expreſsly obliged to it by the laws of the goſpel, which give us a more exalted and enlarged idea of that union which ought to be amongſt Chriſtians, who through the whole world compoſe one divine body, united to Chriſt as their head and lord, animated by the ſame ſpirit, governed by the ſame rules, and engaged in the ſame intereſts.

As every man muſt judge for himſelf, and anſwer to God for his own ſoul, he hath a right, independent of another, to chuſe what religion he will embrace, and to join himſelf to that ſociety of Chriſtians which, in his judgement, enjoys the greateſt purity, and conformity to the conſtitutions of the goſpel, and where he may beſt promote his eternal happineſs. Nor can any man, without he ſhows a plain commiſſion from Heaven, which he will never be able to produce, pretend to judge in matters of religion for another, and oblige him to a compliance with his dictates.

In like manner, every religious ſociety hath a natural privilege of worſhipping in that way which, according to their moſt impartial views of things, ſeems moſt agreeable to divine revelation, of ordering all matters of joint concern to the whole body, and of acting in every caſe as they believe themſelves directed by the ſupreme rule of faith and manners. Nor can any man thruſt himſelf into the ſociety without their conſent, or force them to entertain communion with him contrary to their own conſciences; ſince this were a plain uſurpation upon the liberties of a body entirely independent of him. If it appear to them, that, according

cording to the conſtitutions of the goſpel, there ought to be ſome peculiarly devoted to the ſervice of religion, the buſineſs of whoſe life it ſhould be to explain and confirm the doctrines of Chriſtianity to the people, to raiſe their eſteem and veneration of them, and animate them in the ſtudy and practice of ſincere religion, to whom ſhould be committed the government of the church, and the adminiſtration of the word and ſacraments, they have a title, founded upon the natural rights of mankind, to appoint ſuch eccleſiaſtical officers amongſt them, and to aſſiſt and ſubmit to them in the exerciſe of the powers which they believe their great maſter hath intruſted them with for theſe ends.

As every ſociety united for theſe purpoſes hath a right to determine to whoſe government and inſtruction it ſhall ſubmit in its ſpiritual concerns; ſo it muſt naturally have a power to judge concerning the neceſſary qualifications of perſons whom they deſign to intruſt with that ſacred office; and to confine ſuch an authority over them unto thoſe who can give reaſonable ſatisfaction, that they are in ſome meaſure fitted to advance the purpoſes for the ſake of which ſuch rulers are eſtabliſhed in the ſociety. Nor can, in any juſtice, a man, though he thinks himſelf extremely qualified to advance theſe ends, intrude himſelf into a ſociety which thinks otherwiſe. This were evidently to ſubject them to his opinion, and to uſurp an arbitrary power over them. No candidate, therefore, for the office, can reaſonably complain of hard treatment, though, in order to his obtaining it, a juſt ſatisfaction be demanded as to his neceſſary qualifications; and the ſociety find themſelves, not him, judges of theſe qualifications.

It may be eaſily ſuppoſed, that the principal things which any ſociety will require in their public

blic teachers, reſpect his practice and his faith; his practice, that it be ſuitable to the deſigns of his work, and ſuch as may recommend that religion, the honour and intereſt whereof he is devoted to; and for this end they may uſe all proper means to attain a juſt character of him, and ſufficient information of the manner of his life. As one great deſign of a public miniſter is, to explain, illuſtrate, and commend to the conſciences of his hearers, the doctrine of ſalvation; to vindicate it from the cunning and poiſon of hereſy, and ſtand for the defence of the goſpel; it is plainly reaſonable, that a ſociety which propoſes theſe ends by ſubmitting to their paſtors, ought to have juſt ſecurity as to their fittedneſs to promote them; and therefore they may demand ſatisfaction as to a candidate's knowledge, and natural or acquired abilities, that they may be ſure they make a wiſe choice, and that the man whoſe buſineſs it is to teach others, underſtand ſufficiently the ſubject himſelf. Nor is it leſs allowable for them to be careful that he have not himſelf ſucked in the contagion of error, and departed from that faith which it is their intention he ſhould clear up and recommend to them; and to be aſſured, that he embraces and adheres to the doctrine according to godlineſs. It were unwiſe to think, that any perſon could be qualified to preach, and apply to the purpoſes of the Chriſtian life, a doctrine which he himſelf diſbelieves, or could contribute to promote and improve opinions which he hath a deteſtation or a diſregard for; and it were as ridiculous to imagine, that any ſociety ſhould, by intruſting ſuch a perſon, act in a direct contradiction to the very deſign which they had placed directly before their eye, in the inſtitution of the office committed to him.

As every private perſon hath a natural right to

judge for himſelf in matters of religion, and to pitch upon thoſe opinions which, after his beſt endeavours, he ſees worthy of his choice, and moſt agreeable to reaſon and revelation, and in the further knowledge and improvement of which he endeavours to be aſſiſted by thoſe who may be moſt helpful to him; ſo any number of ſuch united into a body, ſeem to have evidently the ſame privilege; and every ſociety muſt have the liberty to judge for themſelves, what faith they would have preached to them, and what doctrines they deſire to have placed in a clearer light, and daily urged home upon their conſciences, in their ſtrength and purity, in order to their advancing in the knowledge of the Son of God, and in the ways of truth and holineſs. Nor can any other aſſume an authority over them, either to oblige them to hear doctrines which they diſbelieve and diſregard, or hinder them from being inſtructed and animated in that faith which their conſciences teach them they ought to embrace, and from making choice for their paſtors of ſuch perſons only who will do it; ſince this were to claim a power over others who have an equal freedom of thought, and to judge, not only for himſelf, but for his neighbour. Each perſon, then, and every ſociety, hath a title, founded in the nature of things, to determine for themſelves, what doctrines and articles of faith they expect the belief of, and conformity to, from all their paſtors, as a neceſſary qualification of the perſons whom ſhe receives as her miniſters. For which effect, it muſt be allowable for the rulers of that ſociety, to take all proper meaſures whereby it may be diſcovered, whether a perſon is in this reſpect qualified for an eccleſiaſtical office; and particularly by his own profeſſion of his faith, and his aſſurance, that he believes and embraces thoſe doctrines of Chriſtianity.

If,

If, in a degenerate and corrupt age, the moſt plain and momentous truths are denied by thoſe who pretend to own the ſcriptures, and the moſt miſchievous errors are propagated by ſubtile and deceitful diſputers, who pervert the ſacred writings to favour opinions directly contradictory to them, profeſſing to acknowledge the letter, while they have departed from the ſpirit and the ſenſe of the holy oracles; and thereby a declaration of one's faith only in the preciſe words of ſcripture, thus wreſted and ſubtilized, can no wiſe diſtinguiſh betwixt thoſe who hold and teach the moſt oppoſite doctrines, or give any tolerable ſatisfaction to the ſociety concerning their faith; they may juſtly demand of any who pretends to become their paſtor, that he expreſs his opinions in ſuch words as have leaſt ambiguity in them, and are moſt calculated, according to the circumſtances of time and place, to the ends propoſed hereby, namely, a well-grounded aſſurance of his orthodoxy, (if the uſe of ſo frightful a word may be pardoned); or, which is the ſame thing, they may require an aſſent to their public Creeds and Confeſſions, which are the words the ſociety is ſuppoſed to judge the beſt adapted for affording them this ſatisfaction.

Such a ſociety, indeed, of fallible men, are, no doubt, expoſed to miſtakes: they may either believe what is really a falſehood, or they may fancy a true doctrine of more importance than it is, and thereby be led to require a qualification in all their miniſters, which it had been wiſer, and more for their advantage, they had not been ſo ſolicitous about. But this does not at all alter the matter: for, as it is in the caſe of a private perſon, ſuch a ſociety, if it errs, errs only for itſelf, and muſt follow its own light; and it were extremely unreaſonable to imagine, that ſo long as their conſcience

ſcience dictates to them, that a regard for God and their ſouls obliges them to have ſuch a concern for the truth, the moment whereof is queſtioned, they ſhould leave their own judgement, and be influenced by the fancy and authority of another juſt as fallible as themſelves.

As there is no argument in reaſon which determines the bounds within which ſuch a ſociety ſhould be confined, or fixes the number that may juſtly unite together for thoſe purpoſes, there ſeems to be nothing that ſhould hinder any number of leſſer religious ſocieties, to form themſelves into a larger body, deſigned for promoting the ſame ends, and endued with the like privileges: and when the greater part of a nation enter into a ſociety of this nature, there will ariſe what may be underſtood by a national church; and the articles of faith received by them, and eſtabliſhed as a teſt of the doctrinal qualifications of their paſtors, will become a national Confeſſion.

Theſe are a few of the plain and eaſy maxims of nature, which are ſufficient to juſtify the church of Scotland in the meaſures ſhe hath taken with regard to the eſtabliſhment and obligation of her Confeſſion.

Our church was united together by the ſame faith and hope; the members of it embraced the truths contained in her Confeſſion as the uncorrupted doctrines of ſalvation; they believed them moſt agreeable to divine revelation, and the genius of Chriſtianity, and that they were admirably ſuited to promote practical religion in the lives of men, and had upon that account the brighteſt characters of that *doctrine which is according to godlineſs*: in that faith, therefore, our church deſired to be inſtructed and enlivened; it was that ſhe wanted to have taught her by the miniſters of the goſpel; and the dictates of her conſcience

determined

determined her to join in that worſhip, and hearken to that teaching, which was founded upon and adapted to that faith. So far as theſe articles were departed from, ſhe was perſuaded the light of truth was overclouded, and the ſacred oracles perverted; and that miniſters in preaching, or people in hearing, what was contrary thereto, in ſo far miſſed the end, or rather were placed in oppoſition to the very end, which was propoſed by the inſtitution of public teachers.

This being the caſe, ſhe was perſuaded, that ſhe had an inherent right, founded as deep as nature, to confine her choice of miniſters to ſuch as would preach theſe doctrines; and that none had a title to intrude into the ſociety againſt her conſent, or oblige her to counteract her own judgement in order to gratify theirs. She ſaw, that it was impoſſible for any to give her this ſatisfaction as to the ſoundneſs of their doctrine, without openly explaining themſelves, in other phraſes than thoſe preciſe ones which are to be found in the holy ſcriptures; and that therefore Confeſſions of Faith, plain and direct, were neceſſary for this end; a ſubſcription to which ſhe thought, upon that account, her duty to require from all miniſters, and other eccleſiaſtical perſons; in the appointment whereof, authority of both kinds, civil and ſacred, acts of parliament and aſſembly, concurred.

An impartial conſideration of what hath been already remarked, may ſerve to convince our adverſaries, that thoſe very maxims of liberty which they glory in, and would appropriate to themſelves, are props firm enough to ſupport all the weight of that authority which the creeds of our church pretend to. Though there needs nothing to vindicate them, but the fundamental principles of ſociety, and the natural rights of rational crea-

tures; yet it, no doubt, is a mighty confirmation of the uſe which our church hath made of theſe rights, in eſtabliſhing her Confeſſions, and yields a ſenſible pleaſure, that it appears to us that the commands of our Saviour, and the train of the goſpel inſtitutions, approve our conduct, and point out to us the way we follow.

From theſe ſacred oracles we are convinced, that a free choice is the very ſoul of religion, and every man muſt follow the dictates of his conſcience; that Chriſtians ſhould be united together by the ſtricteſt ties of harmony, and formed into the moſt exalted and affectionate ſociety, deſigned for the nobleſt purpoſes, and mutually attracted by the higheſt principles of union, *one Lord, one faith, one baptiſm*; that in this divine ſociety there ſhould be ſome peculiarly devoted to the ſervice of God and religion, the paſtors and rulers of the church, one part of whoſe province is, to hold forth the doctrine of Chriſtianity in its light and purity, and improve it with the greateſt efficacy towards the advancement of truth and holineſs; and that the doctrines of religion are far from being repreſented by the inſpired apoſtles as airy ſpeculations, which might be freely diſputed away; nor do they leave it indifferent, either to the paſtors or people, what they ſhould teach or hear; but the firſt are plainly commanded "to take heed "to their doctrine *;" "in doctrine to ſhow un- "corruptedneſs, and to uſe ſound ſpeech that can- "not be condemned †;" they are diſcharged to teach any other doctrine, or "give heed to fables "and endleſs genealogies ‡;" and all the people are exhorted to ſtability in the faith, and "to be "no more children, toſſed to and fro, and car- "ried about with every wind of doctrine, by the

* 1 Tim. iv. 16. † Tit. ii. 7. 8. ‡ 1 Tim. i. 3. 4.

"ſlight

"ſlight of men *;" and "to mark them which "cauſe diviſions and offences, contrary to the "doctrine which they have learned, and avoid "them †."

It will not perhaps ſeem a very difficult and intricate obſervation, that no man can obey theſe rules, and ſhow uncorruptedneſs of doctrine in teaching others, who does not receive the purity of faith himſelf; and that a Chriſtian ſociety would act a very unwiſe part, did they commit the teaching or improvement of that doctrine, to a man who declined a naked acknowledgement of his own opinion concerning it, and who ſtrove to conceal his real ſentiments under the cover of ſubtile diſtinctions, or doubtful phraſes of an obſcure or variable ſignification.

It may not be unfit to acquaint our readers, that in the foregoing reaſoning, and the improvement we would have made of the preceding maxims, we conſider the church purely as a Chriſtian ſociety, entered into for ſpiritual purpoſes; and we abſtract from any authority and ſupport ſhe may acquire from the ſtate, and from her intereſts and concerns, in ſo far as they are blended with the civil government of a kingdom where ſhe may be eſtabliſhed by law; becauſe circumſtances of a political nature are foreign to the eſſential conſtitution of this divine ſociety. She may ſubſiſt and flouriſh where her external condition is entirely different; the ſame rules may be obſerved then, and the ſame meaſures taken, with regard to the purity of doctrine, as we find was done during theſe ages when Chriſtianity was ſhut out of the court and the temple. The Weſtminſter Confeſſion at this time is applied to the ſame purpoſes by the

* Eph. iv. 14. † Rom. xvi. 17.

Diſſenters

Diſſenters of Ireland, for which it is legally eſtabliſhed in the church of Scotland.

2. The principles which have been laid down, and the uſefulneſs of them for the vindication of Confeſſions, will be further illuſtrated and confirmed, after we have examined the moſt plauſible objections which the adverſaries of creeds load them with; to the conſideration of which we ſhall now proceed.

(1.) The firſt and moſt noiſy argument whereby endeavours are made to run down all creeds, and expoſe them to contempt and hatred, is *, "That they are in their own nature an arbitrary "and tyrannical invaſion upon the natural rights "of mankind, whereby every man hath a title to "judge for himſelf, and not to be impoſed upon by the determinations of others, whether "private perſons, or councils and churches; that "therefore, for any to form creeds, and make "their own ſentiments and darling opinions the "ſtandard of truth and orthodoxy, is to uſurp an "authority over the conſciences of men, founded "upon the maxims of Popery, and directly contrary to the ſpirit of the Reformation; and "therefore, as it is an attempt to be abhorred in "every body, ſo it is particularly inexcuſable in "Proteſtants, who ſeparate from the church of "Rome upon the foot of private judgement; "and ſeems to argue, that though they plead for "a liberty of diſſenting from every body elſe, yet "they would fain keep others from exerciſing "their own judgements, in following the dictates "of their own minds, and that while they are "engaged in a pretended defiance to implicit

* Vide Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 8. 9. 15. 16.

"faith.

" faith. Beſides, it is alledged, that it is contra-
" ry to our avowed principle, *That the ſcriptures*
" *are the only rule by which we are to try all opi-*
" *nions, and determine all controverſies*, for a
" church at the ſame time to claim an authority
" in matters of faith, decide diſputable queſtions,
" and either abſolve or condemn men, according
" to their own *Formula's*, as well as the ſcrip-
" tures."

We hope, how formidable ſoever this reaſoning may appear, that the following account of that authority which our church may claim, as ſufficient for all the ends of our Confeſſions, and of our real ſentiments in this controverſy, will wipe off the aſperſions thrown upon us, and ſufficiently vindicate our character and practice. And we need only apply to the preſent queſtion ſome of thoſe maxims laid down as the ground-work upon which the authority of creeds may be built.

Our church never dreamed what the Papiſts ſo confidently affirm of themſelves, that ſhe is in any reſpect infallible, and raiſed above the common imperfections of human underſtanding; but with an open ſincerity acknowledges, that councils and ſynods ſince the apoſtolical times may err, and have erred; and as a native conſequence hereof, ſhe is far from imagining that her judgement is a certain argument of the truth or falſehood of any propoſition, or requiring an implicit faith of her determinations. No perſons maintain with a more fervent zeal, and put a greater value upon the liberty of Chriſtians, and the right of private judgement, than we do; or with a greater indignation and contempt abhor the tyranny of the Romiſh church, or any arbitrary claims that may be made by others over the conſciences of the people; nor (as we hope it will evidently appear to an unprejudiced eye) do we cover her ambitious inclinations

inclinations with a pretended zeal for liberty, and under another denomination graſp that overgrown authority which ſhe profeſſes to abandon.

Thoſe who run down all Confeſſions as engines of a ſpiritual domination and luſt of power, and give it out that this is the chief purpoſe for which all churches, and particularly ours, endeavour to eſtabliſh them, betray their ſmall acquaintance with our principles, and too much of theſe unchariſable and ſelf-flattering paſſions which they ſo unjuſtly charge home upon their neighbours, and would ſeem to think themſelves entirely purified from.

It is juſtly enough obſerved by the author of the *Occaſional Paper* *, That it is a very unfair and diſhoneſt evaſion, for men who aſpire at a dominion over the conſciences of others, to think that they can palliate their conduct, and preſerve a due regard for the ſacred ſcriptures, by owning them to be the only rule of faith and manners, while, at the ſame time, they aſſume to themſelves a power to explain theſe ſcriptures, and, by the help of them, ſo to determine all controverſies, as to oblige the people to an abſolute ſubmiſſion; ſince it is certain, that an infallible interpreter of ſcripture is the ſelf-ſame thing with a ſupreme and infallible judge, and the ſubmitting to ſuch imperious commentators were to eſtabliſh all that can be wiſhed for by the ſaucieſt pontiff, only without the name of tyranny. But then our church, by her Confeſſions, affords no handle for charging this ſcandal upon her, but leaves it free for every man to examine the ſenſe of particular texts, as well as her doctrines in general, by all thoſe helps which are afforded us for diſcovering the mind of the Holy Ghoſt; and we are ever ready to own, that

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 18. 19.

a Chriſtian ought to embrace that meaning of any paſſage which appears upon impartial inquiry moſt agreeable to the intention of the inſpired writers, rather than that which a fallible council may determine to be ſo.

When, therefore, the ſcriptures are annexed to the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, it is not at all pleaded that the application there made ſhould be followed at a venture by the readers, or that it is a ſufficient argument, that the ſcriptures ought ſo to be underſtood as to agree to the improvement which is there made of them. The Aſſembly produces them as good proofs of the doctrines there affirmed; they think that they are ſo, and that the ſcriptures muſt be wreſted, if they be underſtood otherwiſe; and they hope they ſhall be able, by the authority of theſe texts, to defend the truths of the goſpel which they profeſs, and recommend them to the belief of the unbiaſſed conſiderer. But then, whether they have miſtaken the word of God, or applied it aright, they are willing they ſhould be judged by the reaſons which can be brought for it, and never deſigned to fetter the underſtandings of mankind, or bear down and ſmother a rational inquiry by the weight of their deciſions.

It is not therefore pretended, that human compoſures, properly ſpeaking, are a ſtandard of orthodoxy, and a teſt by which an erroneous propoſition may be certainly diſtinguiſhed from a ſound one; nor can a diſputer appeal to its deciſion as a ſufficient argument for the truth of his principles; ſince it is poſſible, that truth may be on the other ſide, and falſehood may get into the public chairs and the eſtabliſhed creeds of a fallible church. And though we think that the opinion of a great body of men, whoſe buſineſs it is to inquire with the moſt laborious accuracy into

ſacred

ſacred matters, and who, from the nature of their ſtudies, may be generally ſuppoſed to underſtand them more thoroughly than others, ought to make a perſon modeſt in oppoſing his ſentiments to theirs, and ſhould engage him to the moſt impartial inquiry before he abandons or contradicts them; yet we are always ready to own, that he muſt ever prefer what appears to him founded on reaſon or revelation, to the influence of their authority; and that the ſmalleſt grain of an inſpired teſtimony is momentous enough, in a juſt balance, to weigh down a cart-load of human canons and confeſſions.

But the practice of thoſe churches which embrace Confeſſions, and particularly of our own, may perhaps appear to ſome to contradict theſe principles, and that we endeavour by falſe colours to palliate what we cannot openly maintain; ſince it is certain, that all ſuch churches decide queſtions of faith, claim an authority ſufficient for that purpoſe, and condemn perſons becauſe of their oppoſition to an eſtabliſhed human article; which matters of plain fact ſeem irreconcilable with what we have juſt now advanced. And indeed it muſt be acknowledged, that many learned and pious Proteſtants ſpeak with abundance of uncertainty and obſcurity about the church's power in determining controverſies, ſeem not to have expreſſed clearly enough their ſentiments of it, and have, by doubtful phraſes and intricate diſtinctions, perplexed the minds of men, and afforded no ſmall advantages to the declared enemies of Confeſſions.

It is not our intention to engage in this laborious diſpute, or mention every thing that might tend to explain and illuſtrate the meaning of that article of our Confeſſion, chap. 31. where it is aſſerted, "That it belongeth to ſynods and coun-

« cils, miniſterially to determine controverſies of « faith, and caſes of conſcience." Nothing is neceſſary for us but to give ſuch an account of the church's authority in matters of faith, as will be ſufficient for all the purpoſes and ends of our Confeſſion, and upon which the exerciſe of eccleſiaſtical diſcipline and cenſures, in order to make them effectual, may be ſafely bottomed; and we ſhall in a few words explain what we underſtand by that power which the church hath to decide controverſies, ſo clear and eaſy, that there will remain no ambiguity, nor any room to ſuſpect that we mean more than we ſpeak out.

Though, therefore, no ſociety of fallible men hath a right to determine any article of faith, to declare the falſehood of a propoſition, or fix the true meaning of any paſſages of the ſacred oracles, ſo as to oblige others to ſubmit to their deciſions, or appeal to them as a touchſtone of truth and orthodoxy; yet any ſynod or council, or thoſe to whom the government of the Chriſtian ſociety is committed, hath a proper and direct authority to determine what articles of faith are embraced by that ſociety, what are thought by it of ſuch importance that they ſhould be preached to her, and therefore heartily believed by all her miniſters, and, conſequently, to compoſe a body of ſuch articles of faith as are reputed by that church neceſſary qualifications of all thoſe that pretend to an eccleſiaſtical office amongſt them.

And this authority of determining controverſies is all that we plead for upon this occaſion; ſo that when any perſon is convicted of an opinion contrary to the eſtabliſhed Confeſſion, he is not ſo immediately conſidered as chargeable with a hereſy, (ſince truth and error in matters of religion can be judged only by the holy ſcriptures),

tures, and not by any human compoſures), but only it is made evident, that he maintains a principle which that church is perſuaded to be of ſo pernicious a nature and tendency, that ſhe can receive no man for her teacher who gives juſt ſuſpicion of his being infected by it, or declines an open renunciation thereof; and conſequently, upon its being proved that any hath departed from theſe eſtabliſhed articles, it is made evident, that he can no longer remain a miniſter of that church, or an eccleſiaſtical officer in a ſociety, which hath a natural right of embracing thoſe opinions which it ſees moſt agreeable to the inſpired writings, and of ſubmitting to ſuch paſtors alone who in her judgement maintain the purity of the Chriſtian doctrine in its important articles.

And thus our Confeſſion is a proper ſtandard of miniſterial communion in our church, and a rule whereby it muſt be judged whether a perſon, in ſo far as relates to his principles, be endowed with thoſe qualifications which, after our moſt impartial conſideration, we think we may juſtly expect in a goſpel-miniſter who would anſwer the ends for which the ſacred office was inſtituted; and though what is really truth can never be determined by a majority, we hope there is no abſurdity in affirming, that the public rules which any ſociety deſigns to lay down for the government of it, and particularly for trying the qualifications of perſons to be admitted to public offices, may, and indeed muſt, neceſſarily be determined by the majority.

From what hath been now diſcourſed, it appears, that the determinations of a council concerning articles of faith, and their deciſions of controverſies, ſo far as they relate to the preſent queſtion, are not founded upon any authority which one ſet of men have over others to govern

their

their conſciences, and make creeds for them; but take their riſe from that natural power which every man and every ſociety hath to follow the dictates of its own underſtanding, to embrace that ſcheme of religion wherein it perceives the greateſt luſtre of a divine character, and to ſubmit to thoſe miniſters who appear qualified to promote the intereſts of truth and holineſs; and conſequently we may with pleaſure obſerve, that the authority of our General Aſſembly, in her canons and deciſions, is bottomed upon that noble and unalienable privilege of a rational creature, the right of private judgement: and we ſhall heartily approve of all the great things that can be ſaid by the warmeſt lover of freedom, in order to heighten its excellency, as a very important advantage to our cauſe; ſince we ſhall at leaſt have thereby the ſame liberty to value, applaud, and adhere to Confeſſions, which others think they have to vilify and reject them.

Did indeed any ſociety oblige people independent of it to incorporate with them, and ſubſcribe to their conſtitutions and deciſions in religious matters; did they either force an aſſent to their eſtabliſhed Confeſſions at the beginning, or after the perſon had once agreed to them, did they in a ſtrict ſenſe puniſh him for an alteration of his ſentiments afterwards, and for abandoning the public ſtandard upon a more impartial inquiry, and on that account deprive him of any advantage he had a claim to independent of the ſociety; this were indeed to exceed the boundaries of a private judgement, and could not be juſtifiable, unleſs ſuch could produce a right to regulate the judgements of others, and lord it over their faith. But then neither the principles nor practice of our church lead that way, or are in the leaſt expoſed to the objection.

We abhor perſecution in every ſhape in which it hath appeared, and are never for compelling others to ſubſcribe our Confeſſions, or ſubmit to our inſtitutions; being ſenſible, that every man hath an equal right with us to follow the light of his underſtanding, and the dictates of his conſcience; and that the terrors of blood and torture are arguments entirely foreign to the deſign and the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, can never tend to advance its intereſts, nor be poſſibly reconciled with two great fundamental maxims of it. meekneſs and charity; and that baniſhment, confiſcations, or impriſonments, are methods of perſuaſion by which no man, or body of men, have a title to recommend their doctrines to others. We are convinced, that theſe are not the arms whereby truth and righteouſneſs ſpread their victories over the minds of men; and that they are only the tools of error and ignorance, calculated to root out all religion, oppreſs virtue, and extinguiſh light. We have as great a horror as the moſt violent enemies of Confeſſions at that Antichriſtian church which uſes theſe means of conviction, and have as frightful ideas of that monſter of tyranny and cruelty, and will ever look upon it as a very bad ſign of a cauſe when it leans upon ſuch ſupports: ſo that we do not deny to others the ſame liberty which we take to ourſelves. And it is hoped it will afterwards appear, that any temporal loſſes which an eccleſiaſtical officer with us may be expoſed to, when convicted of departing from our eſtabliſhed Confeſſion, can in no ſenſe be called perſecution, and are of a nature entirely different from it.

Wherefore, however ſtrong and perſuaſive the reaſonings of our adverſaries be againſt the tyrannical pretenſions of the church of Rome, or the claims of any other which graſps at an authority over

over the faith of the people; with whatever hatred and contempt all thoſe human compoſures ſhould be treated which invade the place due to the holy ſcriptures in the determination of religious controverſies, and would fetter the conſciences of mankind by their fallible deciſions; and how juſt and commendable ſoever the warmeſt zeal and moſt vigorous oppoſition againſt all projects of this nature are in every man and Chriſtian; we hope it is evident, that the practice of the church of Scotland, and the uſefulneſs and allowableneſs of Confeſſions as a ſtandard of orthodoxy, in the ſenſe wherein we have explained it, are not in the leaſt expoſed or injured thereby; ſince they are bottomed upon quite different principles, and tend to very contrary purpoſes.

And we doubt not our readers will, by an eaſy application, perceive how little all theſe ſtrong and vehement reaſonings, which we have formerly mentioned, againſt an uſurped power over the underſtandings of mankind, and in favour of the noble Proteſtant principle of private judgement, affect our cauſe; and that all that can be ſaid of the excellency of the holy ſcriptures, and their peculiar prerogative as the only judge of controverſies, and ſtandard of truth and error, are perfectly reconcileable with it; and that thoſe frightful images of tyranny, perſecution, and ſlavery, whereby our adverſaries endeavour to impreſs the minds of men with ſo horrible notions of Confeſſions in general, are eaſily diſſipated; and how juſtly ſoever they may heighten our terrors at Popery, and all Popiſh pretenſions, that, if applied to us, they are the creatures of fancy, and owe their being to miſtaken apprehenſions or wilful partiality, and give us ground to complain, that the writers of the other ſide have not treated us, or our opinions, with that charity, moderation,

tion, and impartial inquiry, which they ſo much glory in.

So little reaſon have theſe gentlemen to load our Confeſſion with theſe calumnies, or charge us with departing from the principles of the Reformation, and raiſing the authority of our public ſtandard on the ſame bottom which ſupports the Roman pontiff, that, on the contrary, there ſeems to be place enough in the preſent queſtion for applying the common maxim, "That ſuper-"ſtition and Atheiſm, or abſolute infidelity and "implicit belief, are frequently near one another, "and maintain an intimate alliance." Nor will it perhaps appear an ill-grounded obſervation, that the noiſe made by the inveterate enemies of Confeſſions, tends to clamour the churches of Chriſt out of the natural and unalienable rights of mankind, to overturn private judgement, and oppreſs our conſciences; and, conſequently, that this extreme of imaginary liberty, and theſe high pretenſions to freedom and impartiality, are very apt to meet with the other extreme of arbitrary power, and an haughty impoſing ſpirit.

In order to the clearing whereof, we ſhall but juſt mention a few conſequences that naturally follow from the reaſonings and the ſchemes of that party; namely, That a ſociety hath not power to make rules for its government, that may not be overturned and tranſgreſſed by every man who diſlikes them; That though a church be convinced in her conſcience, that ſuch doctrines only are agreeable to divine revelation, and ought to be preached to the people, and therefore ſhe inclines to make choice of ſuch only for her paſtors who believe theſe truths themſelves, and will inculcate them upon others; yet ſhe muſt be denied that liberty; a perſon of principles directly oppoſite muſt have acceſs to her pulpits; nor muſt he be abandoned or turned out of his office

office becauſe of differences in opinion: That is, ſuch a church muſt be impoſed upon, forced to hear doctrines ſhe thinks inconſiſtent with her edification and improvement in Chriſtianity; that is, perſons who deſire to attend public ordinances, that they may make progreſs in the truths of religion, and be animated in its practice, muſt yet ſubmit to ſchemes, whereby, inſtead of gaining this end, they may be entertained from the pulpit with notions very contrary to theſe purpoſes, and which, according to their opinion, tend rather to retard than advance them in the ways of holineſs, and be obliged to ſpend the Sabbath in a manner very diſagreeable to thoſe deſigns for which it was ſanctified.

According to theſe noble principles of liberty that are ſo much boaſted of, ſome men, the greateſt pleaſure of whoſe life and ſatisfaction to their conſciences it perhaps would be, to be joined to a ſociety of Chriſtians who maintained the unity of faith, and to have acceſs to pure ordinances, and uncorrupted doctrine, diſpenſed by thoſe who were qualified for that office, and had kept themſelves free from the poiſon of error, muſt yet be denied that privilege, obliged to pollute themſelves, by mixing with the impurities of a corrupted miniſtry, and to have their ears grated by doctrines which they deteſt as pernicious, or deſpiſe as uſeleſs or uncertain; and ſo they muſt be robbed of their greateſt joy and comfort, or, which is the ſame thing, they muſt be hindered from uſing what appears to them the neceſſary means of attaining theſe benefits, and arriving at a ſecurity concerning the faith and qualifications of their teachers

That becauſe ſuch free-thinkers, entertaining little thoughts of the doctrines of Chriſtianity, are for allowing an unbounded latitude in matters of faith; and looking upon a perſon as neither a

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worſe man or miniſter for his ſentiments in what they are pleaſed to call, *matters of ſpeculation*, would not think of ſeparating from him on that occaſion, or requiring a ſatisfying account of his belief as a neceſſary qualification for an eccleſiaſtical office; therefore we who think quite otherwiſe, and believe that the doctrines of Chriſtianity are of the higheſt importance, and a denial or contradicting them of the worſt conſequence to the ſouls of men, and that the knowledge and faith of them are glorious privileges of the goſpel-ſtate, and diſtinguiſhed characters of a Chriſtian, muſt act in contradiction to our own underſtandings, in order to gratify their inclinations, muſt be as coldly indifferent as to the intereſts of truth, and as little concerned about what our paſtors and rulers teach and believe.

That becauſe they are fully ſatisfied as to the orthodoxy of one to whoſe miniſtry they would ſubmit, if he own the ſcriptures, and expreſs his ſentiments in the preciſe words and phraſes to be found there, though he decline giving any other evidence of his ſoundneſs, and refuſe his aſſent to articles of faith in any other terms; therefore we who are perſuaded from the fulleſt experience, that cunning heretics *wreſt the ſcriptures to their own perdition*, and rack them, that they may come up to their notions; that they underſtand theſe phraſes in a quite contrary manner to what others think the plain ſenſe of them, and conceal under that fair varniſh the moſt unſcriptural ſchemes, and deteſtable errors, and conſequently that their uſing theſe phraſes is no proof what kind of doctrine they embrace, muſt, notwithſtanding thereof, be contented with the ſame falſe and deceitful teſt of orthodoxy; and if we act the ſame cautious part that every man will do for the ſmalleſt ſum of money he gives in loan, by ſeeking ſome plainer and leſs doubtful ſecurity for a matter of incomparably

incomparably greater conſequence, we muſt be treated with contempt, and expoſed to public ſcorn, as ſour, moroſe, narrow-ſpirited creatures; miſrepreſented as favourers of aſpiring tyrannical councils, and enemies to the perfection of the holy ſcriptures, which, as ſome of the writers on that ſide affirm, are all engines of cruelty and perſecution, as well as external force.

In a word, That we may not be allowed to value, eſteem, and embrace Confeſſions, when we pretend only to a liberty of acting and thinking according to our beſt light, without impoſing upon our neighbours; becauſe other people diſeſteem and run down all ſuch compoſures.

Theſe are a few of the extraordinary benefits which liberty, and a right of private judgement, owe to the endeavours of thoſe that give out themſelves to be the moſt zealous ſticklers for them; theſe are a few of thoſe uncommon heights of freedom to which they have elevated it by their diſcoveries; a freedom, at the bottom, to diſſolve the ſacred bonds of Chriſtian ſocieties, the unity of faith, to jumble light and darkneſs, and make an inglorious compoſition of truth and error; a liberty to impoſe, if not articles of faith, at leaſt a diſbelief and contempt of them upon others, and, under a painted maſk of freedom, to dictate their own notions and ſchemes of an airy fantaſtical liberty to others, in as imperious a manner, and with as magiſterial an authority, as thoſe whom they ſo much exclaim againſt.

Every perſon in the leaſt acquainted with books or men, will be ſoon ſenſible what numberleſs prejudices the greateſt part labour under, and what confuſed notions they have of things; that a ſet of words are frequently uſed, and obſtinately maintained while very little is clearly underſtood by them; and that words and phraſes of a very good intent

intent and ſignification originally, have been wreſted, and abuſed, and employed to cheat the populace, and inflame the paſſions of ſuch as are generally more influenced by words than by things. And we ſhall readily own the juſtice of the obſervation which the author of the Occaſional Paper makes *, That *religion*, *truth*, *church*, *orthodoxy*, &c. have been thus ſhamefully perverted, to ſerve the worſt purpoſes of ambition, luſt of power, and all kind of oppreſſion, civil and religious; and perhaps others beſides the church of Rome may be chargeable herewith.

But is there not ground enough to apply the ſame obſervation to a different purpoſe? Have not theſe favourite words of a party, *liberty*, *free-thinking*, *impartial inquiry*, *private judgement*, &c. been proſtituted to as mean and unworthy purpoſes, and in the mouths of ſome been perverted to as little, or as uncertain, or as dangerous, a ſignification? Have they not been tools to promote atheiſm and infidelity, and a fair maſk, under which hatred to God and goodneſs, and an apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity, have diſguiſed themſelves? Did they ever make a louder noiſe than in the mouths of Deiſts? and have not ignorant and vain infidels, when driven from all their ſtrong holds, and attacked by the moſt clear and convincing arguments, ſcreened themſelves under the covert of thoſe uſeful words, as much as ever the moſt bigotted zealots do by the help of the *church* or *orthodoxy*? Do not we know, that in the mouths and in the lives of many, *liberty* means an unreſtrained licence, and a neglect of religion and virtue; and that the love of it is brought as an excuſe for a cold unconcernedneſs about the doctrines of our bleſſed Saviour, and a diſregard to

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 4. 6. 7.

truth

truth and light? And have not the enemies of the goſpel, who had nothing elſe to ſay, eagerly laid hold of the opportunity, and cried up private judgement, free-thinking, &c. that by the noiſe thereof they might drown the calmer voice of reaſon and argument?

Do not we ſee the writers on that ſide as fond of their own notions about Creeds and Confeſſions, as obſtinate in maintaining and urging them, and puffed up with as diſdainful ſentiments of thoſe who differ from them, as the moſt zealous devotees of orthodoxy? that they are as impatient of contradiction as others; and to apply the words of an author who levelled them againſt another quarter, to our preſent purpoſe, *as warm* and *zealous* againſt Confeſſions and orthodoxy, and ſuch as can be as *rude*, as *unmannerly*, and as *unchriſtian*, in their contentions about them, as their neighbours *? Where in the world do writers treat their adverſaries with ſo much contempt, and diffuſe ſuch an air of ſuperiority, and a fond addictedneſs to their ſchemes, through the whole of their performances, as thoſe who arrogate to themſelves the name of *free-thinkers?* Nor will it be without ground, if we obſerve, that all our adverſaries in this debate ſeem to incline to this project, that while all Confeſſions and Articles of Faith are overturned and contemned, this ſhould nevertheleſs be eſtabliſhed and enforced as an unalterable article of faith, and a conſtant creed, *That there ſhould be no Confeſſions, or teſts of orthodoxy.*

To conclude, the true way to maintain the ineſtimable bleſſings of liberty of conſcience, and private judgement, in matters of religion, is, to avoid every extreme, that either leads to tyranny, or to anarchy and confuſion; and it is not to diſſolve liberty and freedom into licentiouſneſs, to

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 16.

freeze

freeze it into a cold indifferency about the doctrines of the goſpel, or blow it up into an airy phantom, that will break of itſelf, and is too thin and imaginary to be uſeful to any valuable purpoſe: which medium, we flatter ourſelves, may in a great meaſure be obtained, by adhering to the principles of real liberty which have been laid down.

Theſe reflections may poſſibly appear too ſevere; and it was indeed with reluctancy that we made them, ſince we always eſteem that way of writing and diſputing moſt, which is confined to a plain repreſentation of the arguments and reaſons of a cauſe, in their native ſtrength and ſimplicity, without any mixture of ſatire or harſh treatment of an adverſary. But in the preſent diſpute, the reflections ſeemed to be juſt, and the cauſe to deſerve them. It was only imitating a little their own way of writing; and it ſeemed in ſome meaſure neceſſary, to give ſome notion of the unreaſonableneſs of the accuſations brought againſt us, and the little ground that the perſons who exclaim loudeſt have to make them.

THERE remain only two things upon this head to be conſidered.

Firſt, it may be alledged, That how confidently ſoever we diſclaim perſecution for conſcience ſake, and an arbitrary impoſition upon the underſtandings of mankind; yet in fact we approve it, ſince we allow all churches to depoſe their miniſters, if they embrace opinions contrary to their public ſtandards; as a conſequence of which, they are deprived of their ſtipends, that is, their bread, and the only means of their livelihood, which ſeems to be a very great degree of perſecution.

It were needleſs to deny, that a miniſter being thus deprived for departing from the eſtabliſhed

Confeſſion, is laid open to very great inconveniencies; and the want of his ſtipend is an important loſs to him. But we hope it will eaſily appear, that there can be no ground to complain of the church that turns him off; and that they do nothing in ſuch a caſe but what they have an undiſputed right to, and what is both reaſonable and neceſſary, if we conſider, that a man is not thereby deprived of any thing that he hath a natural right to, or which he can claim as a member of the civil ſociety. The forming of a ſociety for religious purpoſes, is, according to the principles already eſtabliſhed, a voluntary act of thoſe who compoſe it; and when, according to what they think the nature of the thing, and the commands of God, oblige them to, public teachers are inſtituted among them, the qualifications of the perſons to be inveſted with that office, and the terms upon which they are to be admitted, and, as a conſequence hereof, are to enjoy the public maintenance which the church hath provided for her paſtors, muſt be ſubmitted to the joint determination of the body; and as no man can intrude himſelf into an eccleſiaſtical office in that ſociety contrary to their inclinations, and the rules eſtabliſhed by them; ſo none can pretend to the public ſalary annexed to it, but in a conſiſtency therewith.

A perſon, therefore, that is not found ſufficiently qualified, or does not think fit to comply with the neceſſary terms upon which this office and benefice are beſtowed, can in no juſtice complain, though the ſociety ſhould either deny him them at firſt, or deprive him of them afterwards; becauſe he had no claim to them, but what depended upon the voluntary grant of the church, and muſt be regulated by its conſtitutions, which if he depart from, he evidently forfeits any title

that he had to his ſtipend. He knows, that the very deſign of the ſociety in ſubmitting to him as their miniſter, and making ſuitable proviſion as to his temporal concerns, was, that they might enjoy goſpel-ordinances, and hear the word preached, in a way agreeable to their conſciences; and that they might have ſatisfaction as to one qualification abſolutely neceſſary, his own ſoundneſs in that faith, they required a declaration of his aſſent to ſuch articles as appeared to them requiſite; and therefore, if he depart from that doctrine, and ſo become incapable of promoting theſe ends, he hath himſelf to blame for any diſadvantage he may be expoſed to, and can in no modeſty or juſtice pretend ſtill to enjoy thoſe benefits that were beſtowed, not abſolutely, but only upon conditions which are violated, and towards purpoſes which he can no wiſe promote. It might as well be alledged, that a conditional gift ſhould take place, though the condition required entirely fail, and have no ſubſiſtence.

I acknowledge, that when a man, in departing from the public ſtandard upon what appears to him better information, acts and ſpeaks agreeably to his conſcience, and chuſes rather to follow the light of his underſtanding than enjoy temporal advantages, he is a fit object both of compaſſion and eſteem: and though he be in an error, his integrity and ſelf-denial ſhould meet with due regard, whatever ſentiments we entertain of his knowledge. Nor is it to be doubted, but a perſon who does ſo, and prefers truth and ſincerity to any of the profits or allurements of this life, will be looked upon by God as a ſufferer for righteouſneſs ſake, and may expect an hundred-fold in the world to come. But then, whether this be the caſe with him, and he be animated by theſe heroic principles; whether, in changing his opinion as to any

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article of an eſtabliſhed creed, he hath embraced the truth, or if he hath in reality abandoned it, and made apoſtaſy from the faith, muſt be left to the determination of God, who certainly knows it, and is the only judge who can be appealed to. Only this much ſeems to be evident, that other people, and particularly thoſe who received him as their miniſter, upon condition of his adhering to, and teaching agreeably to the public Confeſſion, ought to act agreeably to their own ſentiments, and not to his; and may juſtly beſtow their favours upon thoſe who will promote what appears to them the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs, and not on thoſe who are devoted to the intereſts of error or impurity.

So little reaſon is there to call the abſtracting of the benefice from ſuch a man perſecution, that, on the contrary, the obliging them to continue it (which the principles of theſe pretended aſſerters of liberty lead to) were a very grievous oppreſſion, and an arbitrary impoſition. And it will ſoon appear how modeſt and reaſonable a demand they make, if we conſider, that it plainly amounts to this, that a ſociety which gave you a right to a ſtipend upon a certain condition, ſhould be bound to continue the payment when the condition is diſſolved on your part; that the money devoted by them to the maintenance of perſons whoſe buſineſs it is to adminiſter to them ſacred things according to their conſciences, and contribute to the purity and power of the Chriſtian doctrine, ſhould be ſo far diverted from that uſe, as to be ſquandered away upon thoſe whoſe opinions render them incapable of advancing theſe ends, and, which is ſtill more abſurd, who will naturally counteract and oppoſe them, by propagating principles directly contradictory to theſe ſacred truths; and ſo the ſociety ſhall be obliged to contribute to

purpoſes which they believe not only uſeleſs, but extremely hurtful and diſagreeable.

So that this objection brought againſt us is ſo far from being valid, that, on the contrary, did it take place, it would carry along with it a very grievous perſecution, and a notorious piece of oppreſſion. It were to deprive men of their natural rights; and, under a maſk of liberty, to make them diſpoſe of that towards the ſpreading of error or infidelity, which they inclined to devote to the advancement of pure and undefiled religion.

Every ſociety is maſter of its own favours; it is highly reaſonable that it ſhould beſtow them to the beſt ends, and upon thoſe perſons who appear fitteſt to promote them. This in religious matters is eſpecially neceſſary; and it were extremely unjuſt and tyrannical, to fancy, that they muſt act contrary to their own conſciences, and in oppoſition to the intereſts which are deareſt to their ſouls, in ſupporting the apoſtate prieſts of Baal, inſtead of the faithful ſervants of Jehovah. I hope the ſeverity of the compariſon may be pardoned, ſince it is particularly levelled at no body; and the ſame reaſon will hold in proportion, as to all thoſe who, though it be in a leſſer degree, depart from any truths which a church, by making them a part of her Confeſſion, ſhows ſhe thinks momentous.

Did I therefore alter my notions as to articles of faith which I had once ſubſcribed, and came to perceive the falſehood of them, I would think myſelf obliged to follow the dictates of my conſcience; and it were mean and inglorious to diſguiſe my real ſentiments, for fear of temporal loſſes and church-cenſures. I would endeavour alſo, by all due means, to perſuade the church to which I belonged, to change their faith alſo, and embrace what I thought the better cauſe: but if

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I were not able to undeceive them, and after all they remained as they were, it would be extremely fooliſh to fancy that they would act directly contrary to their principles, in continuing me their miniſter, and endowing me with that ſalary which they had allotted to a paſtor that ſhould teach them doctrines which I had found myſelf obliged to abandon. And it were abſurd to imagine, that though *theſe who ſerve the altar ſhould live by the altar*, that yet I ſhould live by an altar which I had abandoned, ſet up one in oppoſition to, and indeed endeavoured to overthrow.

It might be eaſily illuſtrated by innumerable inſtances, that a man may ſuffer temporal loſſes upon the account of a change in his opinions, and yet not have the ſmalleſt reaſon to complain of perſecution or injuſtice. One example or two will be ſufficient: When the corrupted philoſophy of Ariſtotle prevailed in the world, a profeſſor of reputation for teaching, and who was therefore crowded with ſtudents, and reaped a plentiful income from them, would evidently be expoſed to a very great loſs, by changing his ſchemes, and forming new ones, either ſuch as thoſe of Des Cartes, or Sir Iſaac Newton, in their ſtead, unleſs he had the influence to perſuade others alſo to make the ſame alteration in their ſentiments; becauſe, ſo long as the world continued in their former humour, the number of his ſcholars muſt conſtantly decay; and yet he could not with the ſmalleſt plauſibility alledge, that thoſe ſcholars who deſerted his leſſons, that they might beſtow their time and their money upon other maſters, had done him an injury; ſince it was abſolutely in their power to chuſe what philoſophy they would have taught them, and what perſons ſhould enjoy the emoluments ariſing therefrom.

A zealous Proteſtant poſſeſſes a large eſtate, which he deſigns after his death ſhould be ſettled upon a friend of the ſame principles with himſelf, and who, he has reaſon to hope, would employ his fortune and intereſt for encouraging and advancing the religion which was ſo dear to him; that friend, in the mean time, changes his opinions, and apoſtatiſes to Popery: would there be the ſmalleſt colour of hardſhip in the other's altering, upon ſuch an event, the deſtination he would otherwiſe have made of his eſtate, and diſpoſing it to one that he valued more, and upon whom he thinks it will be incomparably better beſtowed? Could he be charged with perſecution in ſuch a caſe, though the other, in following the dictates of his conſcience, really ſuffered as great a loſs as the miniſter who thereby ſhould forfeit the public ſtipend? And the reaſon is plain: Every man, and each ſociety, are judges of what depends upon themſelves; and in diſpoſing of any advantages and emoluments to be enjoyed amongſt them, they muſt follow their own light, not ours, who differ from them, though we may fancy ourſelves righter and wiſer than they.

To conclude, ſince the emoluments and ſalaries provided by any church are dedicated by it to what they think the intereſt of pure religion, and are not ſimply beſtowed upon perſons, but annexed to offices under certain limitations and rules, and for which ſome neceſſary qualifications are required, whereof ſoundneſs in the faith is one, it ſeems evident, that the benefice muſt follow the office, and ſhould be reaſonably applied to thoſe ends for which it was originally intended; and therefore, whenever any, whether by his faith or practice, becomes unqualified for that office, and the purpoſes of it, he muſt immediately loſe all title

title to the emoluments annexed to it, and they must be bestowed on those who are thought fit to execute the charge. With so little reason is our or any other church loaded with the guilt of persecution on this occasion, that our practice herein is founded upon the natural right of every person and society, upon a power over our own property and our own consciences; and therefore, by defending it, we maintain not our particular cause, but the common liberties of mankind, and the fundamental maxims of all government and order: for we pretend to no authority but what we allow to our neighbours in a like case, and shall always be ready to grant, that they may act in a consistency with their own principles, as well as we with ours; and we shall afterwards have occasion to prove, that true religion can never suffer any damage by this principle, and that the contrary was never pretended to by the apostles, or by the primitive professors of the purest Christianity.

In the *second* place, There is another argument whence, as it is insinuated, it appears, that those who adhere to Confessions of Faith, and think that an assent to them may be required of others, are justly chargeable with persecution; which objection we shall give in the words of its author. "This humour (says he) of creed-making and "creed-imposing, is one of the most grievous in- "stances of persecution, and the grand source of "every other kind of it. If it be only their good o- "pinion of us that our fellow-christians suspend "upon non-assent to their Confessions of Faith, "they in a very inhuman and unchristian way "persecute us. 'Tis in itself barbarous (says Mr "Marvel) for these faith-stretchers, whosoever "they be, to put mens consciences upon the tor-

"ture

" ture to rack them to the length of their no-
" tions *."

By what we have already diſcourſed, we hope that we have vindicated ourſelves from the charge of impoſition, and uſurping an arbitrary authority over the conſciences of others, whoſe faith is no ways ſubjected to our determinations; and that we are cleared from the imputation of any unjuſt methods of violence and oppreſſion, in order to propogate our opinions, and force an aſſent to the eſtabliſhed creed; and therefore it will be needleſs to illuſtrate this head any further; and, we doubt not, there will be found as little moment in the other kind of perſecution, which the enemies to Confeſſions charge upon thoſe who maintain them, namely, their withdrawing or ſuſpending their good opinion of thoſe who differ from them, which is thought a great hardſhip, and a juſt ground for loud complaints.

He muſt have little of the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and the temper of its bleſſed author, who does not put the higheſt value upon thoſe lovely graces of our religion, an extenſive charity, a mutual forbearance, an univerſal benevolence to our fellow-creatures or our fellow-chriſtians, and a ſincere inclination to live in peace, and cultivate union and friendſhip with them. We ſhall heartily fall in with all that the other ſide can ſay of their excellency, and concur in every thing that may recommended them to the minds and lives of men, give ſteadier and brighter views of their incomparable beauty, and make deeper impreſſions of their indiſpenſable neceſſity. Nor is it to be doubted, that all theſe virtues ſhould ſubſiſt, even amongſt thoſe who may not be ſo happy as to agree in their ſentiments about every article of faith

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 12.

and

and mode of worſhip. Nor ſhould differences in opinion, eſpecially about leſſer matters, extinguiſh love, or diſſolve the bonds of charity; but that noble principle ſhould have a governing power over all our paſſions, and run through the whole train of our converſation; and, according to the apoſtolical rule, *Whereunto we have attained, we ought all to walk by the ſame rule*, and unite in affectionate endeavours to promote the intereſts of religion, and proclaim the glory of our common Saviour.

That man alſo may be counted of a narrow and inhuman ſpirit, and blown up with prejudices and vanity, who is ſo blind or conceited as to confine virtue and merit to his own party, and his particular way of thinking. A man may be a very good man, and excel us in many valuable qualities, though even in religious matters he may follow a different way from us; and we ſhould always be ready to eſteem and applaud learning, wiſdom, or goodneſs and probity, where-ever we find them, though they ſhould be the ornaments ſometimes of our adverſaries. Meekneſs, and humility, and generoſity, a fervent love to God and our brethren, heavenly affections, and a contempt of this world, or any other noble quality, ſhould not be overlooked, nor leſs beloved and admired, becauſe they may be joined with a miſtaken notion, and the perſon beautified with them may not perceive every thing in our light; and then a particular regard ſhould be paid to the moral qualities of a man, and to practical goodneſs, when we meaſure out our eſteem and affection.

As we ſhould not be wanting in any of theſe reſpects to ſuch as differ from us, and may not come up in every thing to our ſentiments; ſo we ſhould far leſs pretend to judge of their hearts, and the ſincerity of their profeſſions, or the impartiality

partiality of their inquiries; to cenſure them raſhly, or miſrepreſent their opinions; to aſcribe by-ends to them, and load them with reproaches, or attribute hereſies and abſurdities to them which we have no ground for but our own ſuſpicions and prejudices. Nor ought we precipitately to damn and anathematize people upon every difference with us, and, aſpiring to the throne and authority of God, paſs ſentence upon them beforehand, and pronounce their eternal doom. This were indeed to forget our ſtation, and uſurp the place of our maſter. *Judge not leſt ye be judged*, ſhould, in ſuch caſes, ſtill ſound in our ears; and we ought to be mindful of our folly and weakneſs in not hearkening to it, and that God may abſolve whom we ſo ignorantly reprobate. All theſe things we are ready to own, and endeavour to practiſe; and we hope there is no reaſon for charging a contradiction to them upon our church or its articles. And it is with pleaſure we obſerve, that the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, which we embrace, is free from damnatory clauſes; nor is it ever required of us to pronounce anathemas upon others.

But if this will not ſatisfy, and it be demanded that differences in opinion, however momentous, ſhould not in the leaſt influence our affection and eſteem; that no alteration ſhould happen in our judgement of a perſon, and our regard to him, upon his abandoning the Confeſſion embraced by us; and that one who departs from the doctrine of the goſpel, and *makes ſhipwreck of his faith*, at leaſt as appears to us, ſhould yet claim the ſame ſhare in our good opinion of him as if he had remained ſtedfaſt in the belief of the truth: I ſay, if this be the caſe, it is hoped we ſhall be excuſed to think it a very abſurd and imperious demand, directly contrary to the nature of things, and a favour

favour abſolutely impoſſible for us to grant; and that the charging us with perſecution becauſe we refuſe it, is indeed to be guilty of that very crime wherewith they load their neighbours.

It is an univerſally-acknowled maxim, That likeneſs begets eſteem and love, and that agreement of temper and underſtanding cements affections, and animates them. It muſt be therefore hard to imagine, how a conformity of ſentiments, eſpecially in religious matters, which are of the laſt importance, and in which conſiſts the nobleſt tie of union, ſhould fail to have influence of this kind, which a diſagreement in them, and indifference about them, can never gain; and if I have a value for the doctrine of Chriſtianity, I cannot conceive how I can miſs to eſteem the purity of it a very commendable quality in every body who hath it; and that the diſbelief of any part of it is an imperfection which he would be the better if he wanted. If I be perſuaded of the truth of any article of a Confeſſion, I muſt neceſſarily think the man who oppoſes it chargeable with an error; and therefore I can never have ſo good an opinion of his faith, as if he ſtill adhered to it, though on other accounts I may value his perſon, and eſteem him for qualities that are more amiable than another man's orthodoxy in theſe particulars; for eminent advances in practical religion, and a diſtinguiſhed luſtre of Chriſtian virtues, will balance a great many miſtakes, and, to uſe the ſcriptural phraſe, *will cover a multitude of ſins*.

An error of any kind muſt, notwithſtanding hereof, be always a blemiſh; and the greater and more momentous it be, the ſtain of it becomes the deeper and more deformed; and conſequently, the difference betwixt the perſon who is poiſoned with it, and him who embraces the oppoſite

ſite truth, is proportionably increaſed; and this becomes remarkably greater, when the doctrine denied is of univerſal conſequence with reſpect to the general ſcheme and deſign of Chriſtianity, or hath a diffuſive influence upon practice. And therefore, if two perſons were in all other reſpects equal, I could not miſs to eſteem him moſt whoſe faith was pureſt, and who, according to my poor judgement, regulated his belief the moſt exactly according to the holy ſcriptures; and the difference betwixt the regard and affection I had for the one and the other, would depend on the difference betwixt their orthodoxy; (for there is no reaſon to be aſhamed of or clamoured out of the word). Nor could I give an equal ſhare of my good opinion to both, more than I could entertain the ſame value for darkneſs as for light, or perceive as ſhining a beauty in error as in truth, and eſteem him as wiſe and happy who is overclouded with the one as if he were enlightened by the other. As the error ſwells, and becomes more important, ſo muſt my good opinion of the perſon who maintains it ſuffer an alteration till it arrive at hereſy: and then I cannot ſee how it is in my power not to think him an heretic: and then it becomes impoſſible for me to entertain communion with him as a Chriſtian; becauſe I believe his notions inconſiſtent with that pure religion, and that he hath departed from the faith of the goſpel.

And to pretend that our affection and good opinion ſhould not at all be influenced by theſe conſiderations, were not to ſhow an extenſive charity to our brethren; but a cold unconcernedneſs about truth, and an indifferency whether the light from heaven, or the clouds and darkneſs of another place, ſhould prevail in the world. Such a temper would ſeem to argue not an uncommon

fervency of affection to our fellow-creatures, nor a modeſty and humility of mind that could bear contradiction, and allow every man to think as ſeems beſt to himſelf; but rather a faintneſs of love to our God and Saviour, and a lukewarmneſs with reſpect to the honour of divine revelation, little thoughts of the excellency of truth, and a wavering inconſtancy of faith that had nothing deep rooted, and a contempt or neglect of theſe divine exhortations, that we ſhould "continue in "the faith" ourſelves *, and "ſtand faſt in one "ſpirit, with one mind, ſtriving together for "the faith of the goſpel †;" that we "ſhould "earneſtly contend for the faith once delivered to "the ſaints ‡;" that "a man who is an heretic, "ſhould, after the firſt and ſecond admonitions, "be rejected ‖;" that we are to "mark them "which cauſe diviſions and offences, contrary to "the doctrine which we have learned, and avoid "them **;" to "ſhun profane and vain bab-"blings; for they will increaſe unto more un-"godlineſs; and their word will eat as doth a "canker: of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus; "who, concerning the truth, have erred, ſaying, "that the reſurrection is paſt already; and over-"throw the faith of ſome ††." Which muſt hold the ſame with reſpect to all thoſe who corrupt any other article of equal importance; and that "if "an angel from heaven," and much more any man, "ſhould preach any other goſpel to us "than that we have received, he muſt be accur-"ſed ‡‡." We ſhall only illuſtrate what might be further ſaid upon this ſubject by one inſtance.

* Acts xiv. 22. † Phil. i. 27. ‡ Jude 3.
‖ Tit. iii. 10. ** Rom. xvi. 17. †† 2 Tim. ii. 16. 17. 18.
‡‡ Gal. i. 8. 9.

If we ſhould ſee one who had formerly a very uncommon ſhare in our eſteem and affection, and whom we valued on account of his great abilities, and eminent ſervices to the cauſe of religion, falling backwards, and endeavouring to deſtroy that faith which it was thought he once preached, and to undermine the foundations of Chriſtianity, perhaps in ſo eſſential and important an article as that of the adorable Trinity, and the divinity of our bleſſed Saviour, which diffuſes itſelf through the whole of our religion, and is the life and ſoul of it, without which it could have no ſubſiſtence; if we perceive him attempting to rob our Redeemer of his glory and dignity, and degrade him into the rank and dependence of a creature, however high a place he aſſign him among finite beings, and howſoever great ſuperiority over them be attributed to him; if we ſee him contradict the whole train of the goſpel, in ſo plain, as well as incomparably momentous queſtions, as, Whether the Saviour whom we worſhip and believe in, be finite or infinite, God or a creature? Whether the ſubmiſſion, faith, love, dependence, gratitude, worſhip, &c. due to him, be ſuch as ſhould be paid to the infinitely perfect and ſovereign God? Whether they ſhould be the higheſt governing paſſions within us, performed *with all our ſoul, and heart, and ſtrength?* or if they ought to be proportioned to the inferior nature and excellency of a metaphorical, dependent, finite Deity? Whether, as to theſe great objects of our confidence and joy, it be the precious blood of God that was ſhed for our ſins? If the ſatisfaction made to divine juſtice, and the everlaſting righteouſneſs brought in by the Meſſiah, were the works of God, or of a creature? and, conſequently, what kind and degree of admiration, eſteem, faith, and reliance, we

ſhould

ſhould have upon them? and how the whole of our actings towards them ſhould be regulated?

If there be a diſagreement amongſt us in queſtions betwixt the different ſides of which, and the conſequences of them, there is an abſolute inconſiſtency, and infinite diſproportion; and if we find him chargeable with an error, or call it an opinion, of this kind; with whatever fair colourings it be varniſhed, though it be ſupported by ingenious ſubtilties, and cover itſelf by a heap of diſtinctions, and plauſible expreſſions, which may impoſe upon an unwary mind, we can never help looking upon ſuch a man as one that hath apoſtatized from Chriſtianity, and made ſhipwreck of the faith. Let us ſtudy never ſo much moderation and charity, except we ſtifle the light of our underſtandings, contradict the dictates of conſcience, and forget the honour of our Redeemer, and the doctrine of his goſpel, can we look upon ſuch principles with an indifferent eye? or join in religious worſhip with thoſe from whom we differ ſo extremely about the very object of it? or maintain with them the communion of ſaints? and pay that warm regard and affection which ſhould animate with a mutual pleaſure and love all the members of Chriſt's body, to ſuch as we are perſuaded have ceaſed to *hold the head, from which all the body by joints and bands hath nouriſhment miniſtered to it, and is knit together*; ſuch as have renounced the belief, while they pretend to the name of Chriſtians, and have themſelves broken the unity of faith? Others, perhaps, who believe it themſelves, may yet not eſteem this article of ſuch vaſt conſequence, and they may govern their own conduct according that opinion; but we would fain know how ſuch as think vaſtly otherwiſe, and are perſuaded that it intimately affects the vitals of Chriſtianity, can poſſibly miſs to

judge, that the perſon who denies and impugns it hath deſerted from the armies of Iſrael, and gone over to the camp of the enemy; and that, ſo long as he continues that way, he muſt in ſome meaſure be ranked with thoſe ſpoken of, 2 Pet. ii. 1. "who "ſhould privily bring in damnable hereſies, even "denying the Lord that bought them."

It is readily acknowledged, that in ſuch a caſe we ought to lament the loſs of a fellow-chriſtian, ſincerely pity his deluded mind, and maintain a fervent love to his immortal ſoul; which ſhould put us upon every method whereby we may contribute to his recovery, and convince him of his error. Nor ſhould we put off the bowels of humanity, but remember ſtill, that he is a man as we are, and that we alſo are in the body, liable to the ſame miſtakes and deluſions; we ſhould do nothing that may harden him in his error, and needleſsly fret his ſpirit, or inflame his paſſions; but avoiding "bitterneſs, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, "and evil ſpeaking, with all malice *," we ought to ſtudy the apoſtle's injunction to Timothy, to be "gentle unto all men, and patient, in meek-"neſs inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if "God peradventure will give them repentance to "the acknowledging of the truth; and that they "may recover themſelves out of the ſnare of the "devil, who are taken captive by him at his "will †." But then the endearing bond of union which ſubſiſts amongſt true Chriſtians, is unavoidably diſſolved by his apoſtaſy; we can no more entertain the ſame eſteem for him as formerly, nor pay him that peculiar affection and regard which are due to the houſehold of faith, and take their riſe from that divine relation of *one faith, one hope, one baptiſm.*

* Epheſ. iv. 31. † 2 Tim. ii. 24. 25. 26.

Nor

Nor can it be juſtly alledged, that by forming theſe ſentiments of our neighbour, and acting agreeably to them, we *condemn another man's ſervant*, and break our Saviour's precept, *Judge not, leſt ye be judged*; ſince it is certain, that a man who behaves with caution and wiſdom, muſt not beſtow his good opinion, affection, or Chriſtian fellowſhip, upon perſons indifferently; but ſhould examine, how far any are fit objects of them, and muſt be allowed ſo far to determine concerning others as is neceſſary to govern his own conduct. A good opinion of a man is not really at the command of our inclinations, as deceitful expreſſions of flattery are, but muſt be determined by our conſcience and underſtanding; and of all things in the world, our eſteem and love ſeem to be moſt our property, and leaſt under the power of others: and yet thoſe loud aſſerters of the cauſe of liberty would, under the protection of freedom itſelf, by the former objection, have emptied our purſes, and impoſed an arbitrary tax upon us; and by this one they would force us to value them, though we cannot perceive thoſe qualities which merit it, and ſhut our eyes againſt their blemiſhes and errors; and they would tear from us that eſteem and affection which muſt ever proceed from a free choice, and a rational conviction. And if we oppoſe this violence done our underſtandings, we muſt be traduced as perſecutors; a conduct which hath a near reſemblance to another party, who conſtantly complain of oppreſſion, and give out, that their rights are endangered, whenever they are hindered to tyrannize over their neighbours.

(2.) THE ſecond great objection againſt Confeſſions is founded upon the abſolute perfection and incomparable excellency of the holy ſcriptures;

whence it ſeems plainly to follow, that they are ſufficient to all the purpoſes of religion; and ſince they are both ſo complete, that they need no addition, and ſo evident, that they need no interpretation; however important and neceſſary any doctrines be in themſelves, it cannot be neceſſary to determine any thing concerning them that the ſcriptures have not determined, or to decide them by any other explications than the word of God has given of them *. And upon this occaſion the author of the *Occaſional Paper* tells us, that the contrary practice "is not only without warrant "from ſcripture, but is likewiſe the moſt ſignal "affront, and the moſt injurious reflection, that "can poſſibly be caſt on theſe holy writings. It "is denying their perfection; it is ſaying, all ne-"ceſſary truth is not contained in them, or at "leaſt not in ſo good and proper expreſſions as it "ought to be: The phraſes are more exception-"able, and more liable to be wreſted or miſtaken, "than ſome of our own; and thus it can never "be conſiſtent with the honour that is due to "Chriſt as a prophet. It looks as though we "apprehended we knew the Father, his nature, "mind, and will, better than the Son did; or "at leaſt could clothe out as perfect notions of "things, in better, and wiſer, and ſounder words, "than he was either able or careful to make uſe "of †."

By the general principles laid down in the beginning, and what hath been ſaid in anſwer to the former objection, we hope this alſo is in a great meaſure removed; ſince it appears, that we build all the authority wherewith we inveſt Confeſſions upon foundations which are perfectly conſiſtent

* *Vide* Occaſional Paper, vol. 3. N° 11. p. 15.
† Ibid. vol. 2. N° 1. p. 10. 11.

with

with the principles of the Reformation, and the abſolute perfection and ſufficient plainneſs of the holy ſcriptures in all things neceſſary to ſalvation, without the addition of human tradition, or human explications; ſince we in no ſenſe make our Confeſſion a rule, in a conformity to which the ſcriptures ought to be meaſured and underſtood by the people; nor a proper ſtandard of truth and falſehood in matters of religion; which can alone be determined by the holy ſcriptures. And therefore, whatever is adduced by any writer to heighten the excellency of divine revelation, and to eſtabliſh its ſufficiency, fullneſs, and evidence, ſhall not only paſs without contradiction, but be received by us with pleaſure and approbation, and meet with the applauſes due to ſo noble and uſeful a performance.

So that the preciſe thing to be conſidered is, Whether creeds may be drawn up in other words and phraſes than thoſe preciſe ones which are to be found in ſcripture, not as rules of faith, but as declarations of our own ſentiments, and means of diſcovering the opinion of others concerning religious controverſies.

And becauſe the objection is plauſible, it repreſenting Confeſſions as injurious to the honour and dignity of the ſacred writings, the glory of which will be ever dear to all who value our religion; and ſince the leaſt approaches to any thing that may detract from their excellency, or give low and unworthy ideas of that infallible rule of faith, may juſtly ſtartle every pious mind, and would affect us with the moſt ſenſible concern, if we ſuſpected that our principles or practice had a tendency that way; it will not be improper to examine what is advanced by our adverſaries: and therefore we ſhall, by ſome conſiderations, endeavour to ſhow, that it is reaſonable and neceſſary,

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for any church that is reſolved to attain a juſt ſatisfaction concerning the orthodoxy of her public teachers, and for any perſon or ſociety who deſign to make an open declaration of their own faith, to expreſs the doctrines of Chriſtianity in other words and phraſes than thoſe of the ſacred writings; and that they may juſtly expect more of eccleſiaſtical officers than an acknowledgement of their belief of the doctrine contained in the holy ſcriptures, or any particular paſſage thereof; and that, for theſe ends, Creeds and Confeſſions of human compoſure may be lawfully framed and ſubſcribed, without the ſmalleſt affront to the holy ſcriptures, or the leaſt hazard to their divine glory, and abſolute perfection and ſufficiency; and that the confining perſons or churches in their articles and determinations of faith to the preciſe words of ſcripture, is an invaſion upon the liberties of Chriſtians, dangerous to the purity of Chriſtianity, and expoſed to many inconveniencies and abſurdities.

It cannot be diſputed by any who ſubmit to the apoſtles authority, that as there are many avowed infidels, who pay no regard to the ſacred writings, ſo there are perſons of a different complexion, who, though they pretend to own them, yet * being *unlearned and unſtable, wreſt all the ſcriptures unto their own deſtruction*; of which there are evident proofs in every age. Cunning and bold heritics have the confidence to profeſs the higheſt deference to divine revelation, to ſubmit to and believe all the parts of it; and yet they impoſe ſuch gloſſes upon them as entirely deſtroy the meaning of the inſpired penmen; they diſtinguiſh away their ſenſe; and thus, while they keep to the words, they do not adhere to one doctrine

* 2 Peter iii. 16.

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of religion, but clothe their infidelity with a falſe ſkin of truth, while they have as little claim thereby to the Chriſtian name, as the aſs with the lion's ſkin had to the courage or generoſity of that noble creature.

Take a particular text, two perſons ſhall ſubſcribe it, and yet contradict one another in their opinion about that very article, and both of them ſhall fancy the paſſage applicable to their purpoſe. A Socinian, without reluctancy, will aſſent to any phraſes whereby the divinity of Chriſt is aſſerted in the holy oracles; but he perverts the ſenſe of them, and explains all the high titles aſcribed to him, that of God itſelf, ſo that in his mouth it ſhall ſignify a dependent creature; and, in the ſame manner, an Arminian and a Calviniſt differ widely about innumerable paſſages of Paul's writings; and when both ſhould ſubſcribe the words and phraſes of the inſpired writer, they would mean different things, and believe irreconcileable doctrines. Whence it ſeems evidently to follow, that a perſon's owning his belief of theſe ſcriptures, and aſſenting to theſe phraſes, does not let me further into his opinions than I was before, and is not the leaſt proof of the doctrine which he believes, nor can diſtinguiſh to me a Socinian from one who owns the deity of Chriſt; an open enemy to our bleſſed Saviour, from his faithful ſubject; in a word, a believer from an infidel.

Since, therefore, the phraſes of the inſpired writers have been ſo mightily perverted, and wire-drawn from their true ſenſe, at leaſt by one of the parties; ſince people aſcribe to them different meanings, and when they uſe them, expreſs by them very diſtinct notions, and ſo, as they are underſtood by mankind, have become of an ambiguous and undeterminate ſignification; it ſeems evident, that theſe words and phraſes are not at

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all ſufficient and clear expreſſions of a perſon's faith; that thereby there can be no ſecurity attained as to his belief of the moſt eſſential articles of Chriſtianity; nor can a man publiſh his own faith to the world, and bear witneſs to the truth by thoſe phraſes, nor diſtinguiſh himſelf from the moſt abandoned heretic; yea, a ſociety which is perſuaded that Socinianiſm is inconſiſtent with Chriſtianity, were it about to judge of the qualifications of a perſon to whoſe miniſtry it were to ſubmit itſelf, could not, by the help of theſe teſts, diſcover whether he were a Heathen or a Chriſtian; all which appear to be very glaring abſurdities: from which it ſeems to follow, almoſt with the evidence of a demonſtration, that if theſe things are at all neceſſary or allowable, and if they ought on any occaſion to be performed, we muſt do it by the help of other words and phraſes than thoſe of the Bible, phraſes that are adjuſted to the different circumſtances of learning and controverſy, of men and places; phraſes that have a determinate meaning, and by which it may be in ſome meaſure known what is profeſſed and believed.

To ſay, therefore, that no confeſſions or declarations of faith ſhould be drawn up in other than ſcripture-expreſſions, is to affirm, that we muſt be indifferent whether a man with whom we go to the houſe of God, and join in church communion, be a Chriſtian, or not; that is, whether he believe the fundamental doctrines of our religion, or only uſurp the name; that we muſt make ſuch a blind and injudicious choice of miniſters, which is a thing of vaſt moment to a man that values his ſoul, as to be ſo ignorant of his qualifications, that there is a perfect uncertainty with us, whether he believes that doctrine himſelf which we deſign he ſhould teach us, and whether he be

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a real enemy to that faith for the defence of which he is ſet up.

Hence alſo it follows, that Chriſtians ſhould never confeſs their maſter, or his religion, before men who hate and oppoſe him, and ſhould never obey the apoſtle's injunction, 1 Pet. iii. 15. "Be "ready always to give an anſwer to every man "that aſketh you a reaſon of the hope that is in "you, with meekneſs and fear." For I would know how in the world, for example, I can give a teſtimony to the faith of the goſpel in a declining age, and, without being aſhamed of it, profeſs my unalterable love and ſteady adherence to truth, and my diſapprobation and hatred of all thoſe hereſies which at any time prevail over the purity of doctrine, by ſpeaking and owning only what theſe very heretics do, and ſubſcribing a propoſition which every Socinian will ſign at the ſame moment with me. If I do not explain what I mean by a phraſe which is evidently underſtood in ſo different a manner, if I do not manifeſt that I mean ſomething that the Socinian does not, what ſmall degree of ſatisfaction can thereby be given to any man concerning my belief? Will he know more than he did before of the hope that is in me? or be able to tell what I am, and what my faith is? And therefore by ſuch a ſubſcription I really do nothing, and can gain no poſſible end, but to conceal my real ſentiments under a diſguiſe of doubtful words, and impoſe upon the credulity of my thoughtleſs neighbours.

It will not in the leaſt remedy this, to alledge the perfection of the ſcriptures, and the clearneſs and perſpicuity of the phraſes uſed by the Holy Ghoſt; and to infer thence, that they alone muſt be ſufficient for all theſe ends; becauſe, as it is hoped that the groſs fallacy of this argument will appear afterwards, ſo it ſeems enough for the preſent,

ſent, that this reaſoning is *proteſtatio contraria facto*; it is an airy ſpeculation concerning ſchemes which we alledge ſhould obtain, and affirm would be ſufficient for ſuch purpoſes, when it is plain, that in fact the caſe is quite otherwiſe; and that the uſe of theſe phraſes does not at all let me into the knowledge of a man's principles of the higheſt moment in religion; and therefore, with whatever ornaments ſuch a ſcheme for regulating declarations of faith may be buſked up, and how ſpecious and gay ſoever it may appear, it can only exiſt in a ſtrong imagination, but will never ſatisfy any man's conſcience, or enlighten his underſtanding; and the hypotheſis muſt be falſe, becauſe we ſee it fail in experience.

So that this opinion, eſpouſed by many with ſo much zeal, and ſupported with ſuch vehemence, inſtead of doing honour to the ſcriptures, and being of advantage to the truth, ſeems indeed admirably calculated to let in all manner of errors and corruptions to the church, and break down all the fences whereby they may be kept out. It affords a noble covert, under which the groſſeſt heretics may ſhelter themſelves, and a diſguiſe by which they pervert unwary ſouls; nor could a better-contrived form of truth and godlineſs have been wiſhed for by thoſe deceivers of old, *which crept into houſes, and led captive ſilly women* *. It tends to defile and confound all religious ſocieties, and deſtroy the very being of church-communion, the foundation of which is laid in *one faith, one hope, one baptiſm*; and to compoſe a monſtrous body of Arians, Socinians, Gnoſtics, Antinomians, Pelagians, Idolaters, (for ſo we may call the Papiſts), Adamites, Enthuſiaſtics, &c. &c. &c. joined with ſuch as are directly oppoſite to all

* 2 Tim. iii. 6.

theſe; all which blended together are to make up one worſhipping aſſembly, that ſhall eat of the ſame altar, and be edified by the ſame preacher; which is in effect to jumble together light and darkneſs, and make a compoſition betwixt God and Belial; to overcloud the glory, and ſtain the purity, of a ſociety that ought to be *a choſen generation, a royal prieſthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, called out of darkneſs unto light* *. And, in a word, it is to imitate the Jews, in turning the *temple of God into a den of thieves.* Theſe ſeem to be a few of the native conſequences of the principle which we oppoſe; though we are far from inſinuating, that they are the deſign or apprehenſion of all thoſe who maintain it.

It is true, it may be alledged, that creeds expreſſed in other phraſes, of our own contrivance, after all the care that can be taken, are liable to the ſame inconveniencies; that others may underſtand them in a different ſenſe from what we do; and hereticks may pleaſe themſelves with diſtinctions and ſubtilties, by the help whereof they will fancy they can ſubſcribe theſe human compoſures in a conſiſtency with their own opinions. All this is readily acknowledged; and that there is no abſolute ſecurity againſt error, trick, and deceit, amongſt men: and that, after all our endeavours, we may be impoſed upon. But the conſequence of this ſhould be, to engage us to the greater caution to follow the methods which ſeem leaſt liable to miſtake, and not to truſt to a declaration which we know is fallacious.

We are already aſſured, that in the mouths of different perſons the phraſes of ſcripture are ambiguous, and differently underſtood. An Unitarian thinks the plaineſt paſſage where the divinity

* 1 Peter ii. 9.

of our Saviour is aſſerted, may be explained ſo as to mean the quite contrary; and he tells us, that he interprets it that way. If, after this, a perſon's uſing theſe phraſes were received as a ſatisfying declaration of his faith, we would be guilty of deceiving ourſelves, and might be charged with the weakeſt credulity. But whatever may poſſibly happen, yet I have no ſuch ground to ſuſpect, that the like hath actually obtained with reſpect to Confeſſions of Faith, or that perſons in the like manner miſunderſtand them, and apply the words to contradictory meanings: on the contrary, I perceive, that heretics refuſe to ſubſcribe them, becauſe they think them contradictory to their notions, and cannot ſo eaſily pleaſe themſelves with an evaſive diſtinction; and therefore I ſee, that in ſo far they gain their end: and till there appear reaſon to believe the contrary, what ground is there to miſtruſt a perſon of unblemiſhed reputation, or to ſuſpect that he does not underſtand the words of a Confeſſion in the plain common ſenſe, and ſo as he knows that church and ſociety where he is underſtands them?

In the next place, there ſeems to be a great deal of ſuperſtition in the opinion of thoſe gentlemen who would be thought freeſt from that temper, and a great hazard of the people's being poſſeſſed thereby with a very dangerous turn of ſuperſtitious thought. Words are in themſelves nothing, they have no natural connection with things, and are only arbitrary, not neceſſary, ſigns of our thoughts; they derive all their ſignificancy from uſe and cuſtom; nor are any ſet of words and phraſes, even thoſe of the holy ſcriptures themſelves, any way of more value than others, nor worthy of more regard, if we abſtract from the ſenſe of them, and the doctrines which are thereby revealed: ſo that the whole being and deſign of

of words depend wholly upon the meaning which the ſpeaker or writer aſſigns them. In ſo far, therefore, as any language is unknown, or any words of a known language are of an indeterminate ſignification, they muſt be in ſo far abſolutely uſeleſs; and the perſon who uſes them, without a clear explication, had juſt as good have ſaid nothing.

If, therefore, any ſcripture-phraſe be underſtood by the world ſo as to mean different things, if the perſon who ſpeaks in theſe terms refuſes to inform me in which ſenſe he takes them, he might as well ſpeak Chineſe; and very plainly mocks me, while he calls that a declaration of his faith: and when one pretends to ſatisfy me, by aſſenting to a place where Chriſt is called God, and yet will not inſtruct me what he means by the word *God*, whether what is uſually underſtood by that word when applied to the Father, or only a metaphorical deity, as the Socinians take it; in ſuch a caſe, might he not as well, inſtead of the word *God*, put down an Indian one, ſince he would with equal clearneſs expreſs his thoughts in both caſes? To make, then, ſuch an uſe of the phraſes of the holy oracles ſufficient, or at all allowable, is ſo far from conſulting their glory, that, on the contrary, it is turning them into charms and amulets: and it may be as reaſonably affirmed, that a few of theſe words written on a piece of paper ſhould cure a man of diſeaſes, as that, by the help of them, when the meaning of the perſon is indeterminate, he can be cleared from the ſuſpicion of hereſy.

Methinks that then only a regard is paid to divine revelation, when the truths publiſhed by it are believed, and the words of it are underſtood, the ſame way that they were deſigned by the Holy Ghoſt; without which an aſſent to them is to no

purpoſe, nor can be called an aſſent to the holy ſcriptures. When two perſons, a Socinian and a Calviniſt, ſubſcribe a paſſage of the ſacred oracles, whereby they really deſign to teſtify their belief of contradictory propoſitions, while they agree in the words, I would fain know if both of them may be ſaid to *believe and receive* that ſcripture? if one of them, who impoſes ſuch a ſenſe upon the words, as, inſtead of a truth, to mean by them the very error condemned by the Holy Ghoſt, does, by his ſubſcription, in the leaſt teſtify his belief of Chriſtianity, or any of its doctrines? and if theſe words, when they have no determinate meaning affixed to them, can to any valuable purpoſe be reckoned the words of the Holy Ghoſt, or ſcripture-expreſſions? or do not they rather become abſolutely inſignificant, and nothing but a dead letter? Theſe phraſes can then no more be accounted divine revelation, or claim any honour and regard, than a body without a ſpirit can be accounted a man, or a ſkin ſtuffed up with ſtraw can be looked upon as an animal: and to look upon the aſſenting to theſe phraſes as a ſufficient declaration of a man's faith, a receiving of the ſcriptures, or a confeſſing of Chriſt and his goſpel, ſeems to be groſsly ſuperſtitious, and muſt be built upon the ſame foundations with the Popiſh doctrine of *opus operatum*. It is attributing I know not what magical virtue unto certain ſounds, and combinations of letters, without a fixed meaning, as if they could demonſtrate a man a Chriſtian, or an orthodox believer, whenever they were pronounced or ſubſcribed; and, conſequently, by turning ſcriptural phraſes into a kind of charms and ſpells, it is the higheſt injury, and the moſt inſolent contempt than can be poured out upon them, and a reviving of a worſe than the ancient Phariſaiſm, by whom ſo

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mighty a regard was pretended to the letter of that law the ſpirit whereof they had deſtroyed.

Nor can it be alledged, in anſwer to this, that though theſe two ſubſcribers of a ſcripture-phraſe which they refuſe to explain, may really deſign to give their aſſent by the ſame deed to contradictory propoſitions, that yet each of them may have a diſtinct apprehenſion of his own meaning, and a determinate notion of that which he takes to be the intention of the inſpired penman; which is enough to free them from the charge of uſing theſe ſcripture-words as a charm, or imagining that ſounds, without a ſignification, are poſſeſſed of any real value or efficacy. For this does not in the leaſt touch the difficulty. A man, according to the apoſtle's rule, may have faith to himſelf; but when he pretends to make a declaration of his faith, he muſt calculate it for his neighbours, and make it ſo that I may underſtand his meaning, elſe it entirely loſes its end. Words are not intended to repreſent a man's thoughts to himſelf: in ſuch a caſe he might modulate his voice what way he pleaſed, and when he pronounced the moſt barbarous and unknown ſounds, be thinking on any ſubject he fancied moſt.

But words are evidently the expreſſions of our thoughts to others; and in the preſent caſe they are means whereby another may be informed concerning my faith; and conſequently they muſt be plain and determinate in their ſignification: which I am ſure a phraſe taken by the ſubſcribers in very different ſenſes can never be, unleſs they fix upon the ſenſe in which they underſtand them: and if this be denied, the perſon as really ſpeaks in an unknown tongue to me as if he uſed Malabarick words. The man who ſpoke with tongues, mentioned by the apoſtle, 1 Cor. xiv. no doubt underſtood what he meant, and might edify himſelf

thereby; but then it was ridiculous for ſuch a ſpeaker to talk to others; for he truly *ſpake not unto men, but unto God; for no man underſtandeth him, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.* And if the apoſtle thought that ſuch ſpeakers would be accounted mad, by the unlearned and unbeliever who ſhould come in among them, what thoughts muſt he have entertained of thoſe who would pretend to confeſs their faith, and give an account of their doctrine to others, in an unknown tongue, or, which is the ſame thing, in phraſes which they knew had double ſenſes affixed to them by the world, without determining the ſenſe which they took them in? Surely that they were poſſeſſed with a more extravagant fancy than the others.

The Papiſts, I doubt not, will reckon themſelves under unuſual obligations to theſe gentlemen: for never could any thing be invented more plauſible to recommend prayers in an unknown tongue, than the forming creeds in the ſame language; for indeed the firſt ſeems to be a much fairer practice. Prayers may be underſtood by the prieſt, who puts them up in the name of the congregation; and they are immediately addreſſed to God, who certainly underſtands them equally in all languages: and if the *opus operatum* were of any efficacy, ſuch prayers would be very ſerviceable. But public confeſſions of one's faith are deſigned for others, and directed immediately to the people; and therefore, if they be drawn up in ambiguous words, that is, words which it is doubtful what the ſpeaker means by them, they are in a peculiar meaſure ridiculous.

When we profeſs the truths of the goſpel, *give a reaſon of our hope to one that aſks us*, and pretend to ſatisfy others about a matter of ſo great importance, if in any caſe, we ſhould then uſe the greateſt

greateſt clearneſs of expreſſion and openneſs of mind; and what the Apoſtle with ſo much plainneſs and importunity writes to the Corinthians concerning them that propheſied, ſeems to hold with an uncommon force in the preſent queſtion, and to be extremely applicable to our purpoſe, 1 Cor. xiv. 3. "He that propheſieth, ſpeaketh unto men "to edification, and exhortation, and comfort;" ver. 7. "And even things without life giving "ſound, whether pipe or harp, except they give "a diſtinction in the ſounds, how ſhall it be "known what is piped or harped?" ver. 8. "For "if the trumpet give an uncertain ſound, who "ſhall prepare himſelf to the battle?" ver. 9. "So likewiſe you, except ye utter by the tongue "words eaſy to be underſtood, how ſhall it be "known what is ſpoken? for ye ſhall ſpeak into "the air." ver. 11. "Therefore if I know not "the meaning of the voice, I ſhall be unto him "that ſpeaketh, a barbarian; and he that ſpeak-"eth ſhall be a barbarian unto me." I am ſure it would look like a more preciſe regard to the ſcriptures, and every way as ſatisfactory, to confine one's ſelf to the original, and when making a confeſſion of his faith to an ordinary congregation, to ſpeak Greek, as to pronounce or ſubſcribe the phraſes of an Engliſh tranſlation, which have very contradictory meanings impoſed upon them, while he refuſes to give any account of his ſenſe of them.

It will be acknowledged by all ſides, that there is, or ought to be, ſuch a thing as unity of faith among Chriſtians; and that they may join together in the profeſſion of the ſame common religion; and that their publiſhing declarations of faith, or creeds of any kind, is deſigned to teſtify their agreement and communion therein. Now I would fain know, when a Socinian and a Calviniſt

Calviniſt ſubſcribe the ſame paſſage of the holy oracles, what it is which is teſtified thereby? Not an agreement in the belief of any doctrine, not the remoteſt conformity of ſentiments, for it is plain in theſe things they differ widely; but an agreement in words without a meaning, an union in empty ſounds. And ſurely to look upon this as a foundation of Chriſtian communion, and the only or the proper way whereby a church can declare its belief, is the moſt extravagant ſuperſtition, and a converting the words of the inſpired writers into ſo many charms, and forming them into machines of *legerdemain*, by the help of which truth and error may be repreſented in the ſame likeneſs.

The only way to evade theſe abſurdities which occur to us, is to alledge, that they are as far as we from deſigning to uſe words of an uncertain meaning; and that though they think, that the doctrines of the goſpel ſhould be expreſſed only in the words of the Holy Ghoſt, yet they are willing to explain what they mean by theſe words, and what they take to be the true ſcriptural ſenſe of them. But if they will do this, they yield the whole queſtion, and we are perfectly agreed; for to ſubſcribe a paſſage of ſcripture taken in ſuch a particular ſenſe, is the ſame thing with ſubſcribing thoſe phraſes by which we determine our ſenſe of that ſcripture, or with making them a part of our creed; which is all that is pleaded by us.

In reality, it is the doctrines, and not the words, that muſt only be meant by the holy ſcriptures, when we are commanded to receive them, and ſubmit to them. It is they only that can claim our higheſt eſteem, and the ſacredeſt regard to their honour; it is the mind and ſenſe of the Holy Ghoſt, delivered to us by the apoſtles and prophets,

phets, which can alone be called divine revelation, and reſpected as the perfect rule of our faith and manners, and not empty phraſes and combinations of letters. And conſequently, where-ever theſe doctrines are taught and profeſſed in their purity, in whatever terms they be expreſſed, the holy ſcriptures are reverenced, and made the ſtandard of faith; and where theſe doctrines are denied, and contradictory opinions embraced, there in ſo far the Bible is rejected, and another rule of faith is ſet up, and valued more than divine revelation; though, in the mean time, all the phraſes of the holy ſcripture, and they only, ſhould be uſed by that perſon, under a pretence of a more ſtrict adherence and ſubmiſſion to the holy oracles.

In vain do ſuch honour God, ſeeing, by the falſe or ambiguous ſenſe they have affixed to the words of ſcripture, they have made the commandments and the doctrines of the Bible, that is, the whole of its deſign, every thing that has life and ſpirit in it, of none effect. Well may ſuch be ranked with the hypocrites, *who honour God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.*

All the articles, then, which any church, and particularly ours, place in their Confeſſions, are, or ought to be, the very doctrines of Chriſtianity revealed in the holy ſcriptures; and we hope, with us, that they are the things themſelves, tho' not the preciſe words whereby they are expreſſed; nor do we ever pretend to give any new deciſions concerning the truths of religion but what the Bible hath given, or to add any explications or reſtrictions of the goſpel-revelation but what the word of God itſelf hath given. When, therefore, for example, we in our Confeſſion declare our belief of the Trinity, in ſuch plain and determinate words as to make it evident we believe that

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the Son of God, our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, are by nature GOD, the ſupreme infinite maker of the world, one GOD with the FATHER, and not a metaphorical and dependent god; we aſſert the preciſe ſame doctrine, without addition or alteration, which is revealed in a great many paſſages of ſcripture. This is the thing contained in theſe texts; and if that doctrine be abſtracted from, or diſbelieved, as it is by Socinians and Arians, the adhering to theſe texts is not an adhering to the ſcriptures, but only to a dead letter, to words without the things ſignified by them.

So that we perfectly agree with the author of the Occaſional Paper, "That however important "or neceſſary theſe doctrines be in themſelves, "yet it cannot be neceſſary to determine any "thing concerning them that the ſcriptures have "not determined, or to decide them by any o-"ther explications than the word of God has gi-"ven of them *." Nor are we chargeable with any of the bad conſequences which he alledges follow the denial of that principle: for the doctrine taught in our Confeſſion is not another thing, but the ſelf-ſame thing determined by the ſcriptures concerning the deity of the Son of God; that is, we think ſo. And we have eſſayed to prove already, that every perſon, and each ſociety, hath a right to make all the uſe that is made of our Confeſſion; and that in what relates to it, they muſt follow the light of their own conſciences, and act according as things appear to them.

BUT we proceed to ſome other inconveniencies and abſurdities which ſeem to attend the opinion

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 3. N° 11. p. 15.

of

of thoſe gentlemen who maintain, that no words or phraſes but thoſe exactly which occur in the ſacred writings, are to be made uſe of in confeſſions or declarations of faith.

According to this principle, there can be no expoſitions made of the ſcriptures to the people by their miniſters, nor any preaching of the goſpel. All the public, or even private teaching or inſtructing, muſt conſiſt wholly in reading of the ſcriptures. How fatal this would be to religion, and how plainly it would overturn one great deſign of the miniſtry, needs not be proved. Nor need we inſiſt in ſhewing, that it hath been the practice of all churches in all times, even of ſuch whoſe example ought to be of authority with us, I mean the apoſtolical churches, to expound the holy ſcriptures, and teach the people the doctrines according to godlineſs, in the way moſt adapted to their ſeveral capacities and circumſtances. Thus we find, that after the return of the captivity, as the *Levites read to the people in the book of the law of God diſtinctly*, ſo *they gave the ſenſe, and cauſed them to underſtand the reading* *. That this inſtitution of preaching obtained in the Jewiſh ſynagogues, and was approved by our Saviour, ſeems pretty plain †; and what was the common practice, and the received notion of this matter, ſeems evident from the eunuch's anſwer to Philip, Acts viii. 30. 31. "And Philip heard him "read the prophet Eſaias, and ſaid, Underſtand-"eſt thou what thou readeſt? And he ſaid, "How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide "me?" But it is indeed needleſs to inſiſt upon a matter which ſeems to be agreed to upon all ſides; nor have we any ground to ſuſpect, that thoſe who differ from us in the other point, are

* Neh. viii. 8. † Luke iv. 15. 16. &c.

enemies

enemies to the office of the miniſtry, and to the preaching of the goſpel.

Methinks whatever a man ſpeaks concerning religion, he may ſubſcribe it alſo; but he ſhould be much more ready to give the ſolemneſt aſſent himſelf to every thing which he delivers from the pulpit, as the will of God to the people. Nor can I imagine the ſmalleſt reaſon why a miniſter ſhould refuſe to ſubſcribe his own ſermon, and the doctrines taught in it. Ought there not to be as great ſincerity, as accurate caution that nothing be ſpoken there without a divine warrant, as inviolable a regard to truth, and as cloſe an adherence to the revelation of the goſpel, and as awful impreſſions of the great God, and the eternal concerns of mens ſouls, upon a miniſter in the pulpit, as any where elſe?

When a paſtor of the church ſtands in that place from which nothing but the ſacred truths of the goſpel in all their purity and certainty ſhould ever proceed; where, if at any time, he muſt *hold faſt the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by ſound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainſayers* *; where they ſtand as it were *in Chriſt's ſtead*, and ſpeak *as though God did by them beſeech men to be reconciled to him* †; will he then venture to deviate from the great rule of his preaching, and play with his own office, and the ſouls of men, by making conjectures, and giving way to gueſſes of his own, the ſubſcribing of which as articles of faith he will afterwards ſcruple at?

Every miniſter ought to *ſpeak becauſe he believes;* and when he preaches any thing from the pulpit, by theſe very words he confeſſes his own faith in the moſt ſolemn and awful manner, and

* Tit. i. 9. † 2 Cor. v. 20.

virtually ſubſcribes a creed drawn up in theſe terms: ſo that the ſame reaſon that will confine creeds to the preciſe phraſes of ſcripture, will confine ſermons unto them alſo; and then reading muſt be all that is meant by preaching. Yea, the argument ſeems much ſtronger in the caſe of preaching than in the other: for, in a creed, a man, or a ſociety, expreſs their own opinion only, and declare what they think truth; in which there does not ſeem to be the leaſt hazard in their uſing their own words; but in a ſermon, the preacher pretends to deliver the mind of the Holy Ghoſt, and tell what he hath revealed unto the people; which would give at leaſt a more plauſible ground for reſtricting him to ſcripture-expreſſions. Yea, ſo extremely unreaſonable is this notion, that it ſeems to be a conſequence of it, that we ſhould never write or ſpeak at all about any religious ſubject, otherwiſe than by repeating the ſcripture; ſince we may always atteſt with our hand what we affirm to be our opinion with our mouth.

And indeed it is ſcarce poſſible for our adverſaries themſelves to ſhun a contradiction of their notions in their own practice, as the non-ſubſcribers met at Salters-hall ſeem to do, at that very time when they muſt have had that principle full in their view, and would readily be moſt cautious not to counteract it. I thought it very pleaſant to take notice, that after all the clamour raiſed againſt declarations of faith in other words than thoſe of ſcripture, their advices to the Exeter people begin with two articles concerning church-communion, expreſſed in other words than thoſe of the ſacred oracles. "We are (ſay they,) clearly "of opinion, firſt, That there are errors in doc-"trine of that important nature, as will not only "warrant, but even oblige, a Chriſtian congre-"gation to withdraw from the miniſter, or mini-

" ſters, that maintain and defend theſe doctrines; " 2dly, That the people have a right to judge for " themſelves what theſe errors are, and when " they are ſo taught and propagated, as will ju- " ſtify them in withdrawing from ſuch their mi- " niſter *." Which two propoſitions are ſubſcribed by a great many hands; by doing which, they in ſo far evidently declare their belief concerning theſe two queſtions of church-communion, and private judgement, as much as if theſe articles had been ingroſſed with a Confeſſion of Faith, and it ſubſcribed by them. Or if there be any terrible thing in the name of a creed which ſtartles them, (though thoſe would ſeem extremely ſuperſtitious fears which are begot by a word), let any church declare their opinion as to the other articles of religion to the ſame purpoſe, as is done with reſpect to theſe two points, and we ſhall be ſatisfied; being aſſured, that whatever external denomination may be put upon it, it will be all in effect that is meant or intended by Confeſſions of Faith.

This opinion likewiſe hath a very unfavourable aſpect towards all tranſlations of the Bible, and ſeems to make it abſolutely impracticable for ſuch as are unacquainted with the Hebrew or Greek languages ever to declare their faith, and give a public aſſent to the doctrines of the goſpel, tho' it be an evident command of our Saviour to all Chriſtians, upon proper occaſions, to *confeſs him and his goſpel before men, and to bear witneſs to the truth.*

Every body muſt own, that the Bible written in the original tongues alone, conſiſts, in a ſtrict ſenſe, of thoſe phraſes made uſe of by the Holy Ghoſt, and they only can be called the words of

* Vide Advices and Rules agreed to at Salters-hall, March 29. 1718-19.

divine

divine revelation; and that no tranſlation, for example, no Engliſh phraſes whatſoever, can have any title to that name, or pretend any dignity and authority of ſcripture-expreſſions, except only as they are a juſt interpretation of the Hebrew and Greek, and in ſo far as their ſignification correſponds to and gives the true ſenſe of the original: and we hope it cannot be denied, that if, inſtead of this, an ignorant interpreter, or cunning deceiver, who was reſolved at any rate to promote his favourite ſchemes, ſhould tranſlate a paſſage of the Greek New Teſtament into ſuch Engliſh phraſes as did not agree to the original, nor expreſs the ſenſe of the inſpired writer, it were extremely abſurd to call thoſe Engliſh phraſes ſcriptural words, or reckon that a man who aſſented to them, aſſented to the words of the Holy Ghoſt. When, therefore, a perſon ſubſcribes a text as it is found in our Engliſh verſion, and deſigns to declare his faith thereby in ſcriptural phraſes, becauſe he thinks theſe only ſhould be uſed in ſuch caſes, he muſt be ſuppoſed neceſſarily, by his ſubſcription, to approve of our verſion of that text, rather than any other, and do what is virtually a declaring, that he thinks the true meaning of the original expreſſed thereby; which is the ſame thing, as to all intents, as if he ſubſcribed the articles of any particular church in other terms than thoſe of ſcripture, or gave his aſſent to the Confeſſions of a party which he liked beſt.

To give a clearer idea hereof, it may not be improper to illuſtrate it by one inſtance: A plain Engliſhman that underſtands nothing beſides his native tongue, makes a declaration of his faith in ſcripture-expreſſions only; and amongſt others, for that purpoſe, he makes of the Apoſtle's

words, Rom. ix. 5. Ὧν οἱ πατέρες, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ παντων Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τὺς αἰῶνας. Αμήν. Which original expreſſions of the inſpired writer may be rendered two ways: firſt, Thus, as our verſion hath it, *Whoſe are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the fleſh, Chriſt came, who is over all, God bleſſed for ever:* or, 2dly, thus, *Whoſe are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the fleſh, Chriſt came; God, who is over all, be bleſſed for ever.* Which two tranſlations are pretty different. By the words of the firſt, the deity of Chriſt ſeems to be plainly enough aſſerted; by thoſe of the ſecond, that truth is not affirmed, becauſe they may be well enough applied to God the Father. Now the words of both theſe tranſlations cannot be denominated ſcriptural phraſes; only he that ſubſcribed one of them did in reality make uſe of ſcripture-language; while he that aſſented to the other uſed words of human invention, ſince there was no juſt foundation for them in the original language of the inſpired penman: and, conſequently, when a perſon makes choice of thoſe Engliſh phraſes which he reckons moſt agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghoſt, does not he thereby in effect declare that he thinks the Calviniſt or Socinian tranſlation preferable to the other, and ſo, to all effects and purpoſes, as much determines the ſenſe in which he takes that ſcripture, as if he had explained it in words of his own, and ſubſcribed them as an article of his faith?

It is known to all thoſe who have any acquaintance with controverſy, how much all queſtions as to the doctrines of religion depend upon the manner in which the principal texts relating to them ought to be tranſlated; and it is a defect in language that they do not almoſt entirely do ſo: for could

could we free our phraſes of all ambiguity, and uſe words in a determinate ſignification, that ſo we might certainly know what we mean by every expreſſion, the chief controverſy would then be, in what way ſuch a text ſhould be tranſlated; becauſe, by that means, it would be known what were truth and what were falſehood; and then Confeſſions of Faith might be ſo framed, that the chief thing imported by our ſubſcribing them ſhould be, that we believe ſuch and ſuch texts ought to be ſo tranſlated; and that the interpretation given of them by the oppoſite ſide, is erroneous, and contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghoſt; or, which is the ſame thing, our Confeſſions would conſiſt of thoſe determinate words whereby one perſon or party thought the original texts ſhould be tranſlated, and upon that account called them ſcripture-phraſes.

Would not Confeſſions of this kind be attended with all the ſuppoſed bad conſequences; would they not be inveſted with the ſame authority, calculated for the ſame purpoſes, and built upon the ſame foundations with our preſent creeds? And as the caſe juſt now obtains (when no language hath the advantage to be thus perfectly clear and determinate) with reſpect to the ſcheme of declarations of faith favoured by our adverſaries, it is plain, that the words of no tranſlation can be reckoned ſcripture-phraſes, but in ſo far as they agree exactly to the original; that therefore a man can never be deſired to ſubſcribe any paſſage of our Engliſh Bible, if he fancy that it is not rightly interpreted, more than he can be deſired to aſſent to an article in words of human compoſure; for ſo the words of that text will appear to him; and that, for any ſociety to expect that he ſhould ſubſcribe theſe Engliſh phraſes, becauſe they appear to them to be truly ſcriptural, is no

leſs a human impoſition, and a human deciſion in a religious controverſy, than the framing for that purpoſe an article of the Weſtminſter Confeſſion.

If, then, theſe gentlemens opinion in this matter were allowed of, there could be no declaration of faith of any kind, except in Greek and Hebrew, in which alone the very phraſes written by the inſpired penmen are to be found; and, conſequently, no perſon who did not underſtand theſe languages could ever perform the undiſputed Chriſtian duties, of *bearing a teſtimony to the truth, confeſſing our Saviour and his doctrines before men, and giving a reaſon of the hope which is in us to them that aſk it*: which, beſide other inconveniencies, ſeems very favourable to the ambitious claims of the Pontiff, by its tending to deprive the people not only of the right of private judgement, but of private practice alſo.

It might poſſibly be ſhowed by ſome plauſible enough conſiderations, that there were no ſmall difficulties, according to their ſcheme, in forming a Confeſſion anſwerable to it, even in the Greek and Hebrew; and that therefore no perſons whatſoever, even the moſt learned, could ever make Confeſſions of their Faith. But it ſeems needleſs to inſiſt upon this further, ſince what hath been obſerved on the former head ſeems ſufficient for that purpoſe.

Yea ſo extremely abſurd is this ſcheme, that, according thereto, it would be impoſſible to frame a Confeſſion, or an acknowledgement of a miniſter's or a private Chriſtian's faith, which the church might expect an aſſent to, even in the original Greek and Hebrew texts of ſcripture, ſuppoſing that the perſons fully underſtood theſe languages. For if a miniſter ſhould, for inſtance, doubt whether the text of ſcripture that ſpeaks moſt plainly of the divinity of our Saviour, ought

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to be underſtood of him, and thinks it rather ſhould be applied otherwiſe, he cannot poſſibly ſubſcribe the original words of that text, ſo as they may be a teſt of his orthodoxy in this particular; and the church which ſhould determine their application to Jeſus Chriſt, and require a miniſter or Chriſtian, in order to his admiſſion among them, to give his aſſent to theſe ſcriptural phraſes ſo underſtood, would, equally with us, expoſe itſelf to all the clamorous objections which are made againſt human creeds.

This will appear further, if we conſider the ſeveral various readings which are to be found in the ſacred writings; one of which alone is genuine, and muſt have the ſole claim to the dignity and authority of inſpired words. Now it ſeems, according to the principles of our adverſaries, that no church could fix upon this genuine reading, and require an aſſent to it from their public teachers; ſince that were indeed to determine what were ſcripture, what not; and the demanding an aſſent to ſuch a determination would be exclaimed againſt as an arbitrary impoſition; as a native conſequence of which, no public Confeſſion of Faith could be compoſed in the words of ſuch texts of ſcripture as admit of various readings, whereby a great many paſſages of the holy oracles would be neceſſarily excluded.

This difficulty will prove of greater extent and importance with reſpect to thoſe who deny the divine authority of ſome of thoſe books of the New Teſtament which have been generally received by Chriſtians; as, on the other hand, were this novel ſcheme of Confeſſions allowed, ſuch people as Mr Whiſton, who would obtrude upon the church a new ſet of pretended inſpired writers, might alledge, that a profeſſion of their faith in the phraſes of thoſe books adopted by them, and

embraced

embraced as the word of God, were ſufficient to all the privileges of Chriſtian or miniſterial communion; and that it were a manifeſt invaſion of their religious freedom to require any other teſts of orthodoxy from them. And ſurely it ſeems to argue every way as great an authority in matters of faith, for a church to determine what books ſhe thinks divinely inſpired, and which muſt accordingly be owned as ſuch by her members, as it is for the ſame church to declare what doctrines ſhe judges to be the fundamental principles of Chriſtianity, unto which all ought to give their aſſent who lay claim to church-privileges, or at leaſt pretend to the office of a public teacher.

In the next place, it is hoped, upon a ſhort view, it will be acknowledged, even by our adverſaries themſelves, that if creeds be confined to ſcripture-expreſſions, negative articles of faith muſt be neceſſarily excluded; by which is underſtood that part of Confeſſions whereby errors and hereſies are diſclaimed and renounced. Of this nature is our ſhort Confeſſion of Faith, afterwards called the *National Covenant*, where all the abominations of Popery are particularly diſowned with a juſt abhorrence of them. The reaſon of the thing, and many paſſages of ſcripture; the regard due to the truths of the goſpel, and the honour of our Saviour's doctrine; that openneſs of mind, and conſtant ſincerity, which Chriſtians ſhould manifeſt on all occaſions, and eſpecially with relation to the concerns of their ſoul; the duty incumbent upon all thoſe who maintain the purity and unity of faith, to reject obſtinate heretics, and ſeparate themſelves from the unclean; together with the ſacred caution which every man ought to have with reſpect to his integrity and reputation; all concur in demonſtrating, that it is both reaſonable and neceſſary for Chriſtians,

upon

upon proper occaſions, to declare their deteſtation of monſtrous hereſies which prevail at any time in the church, and to clear themſelves of any ground of ſuſpicion that they are infected by the poiſon of them. And this kind of creeds is eſpecially incumbent upon thoſe who forſake a falſe religion, or a heretical ſect, and deſire to be received into the communion of the church.

But now it is abſolutely impoſſible that ſuch a Confeſſion can be compoſed in ſcripture-phraſes; becauſe the hereſies to be renounced had not then ſprung up, and therefore there could be no place for any thing, in expreſs terms, concerning them, with the ſacred writers. How can the blaſphemies of the Manichees and Valentinians, the dreams of the German Annabaptiſts, and other fanatics, the ſuperſtitious idolatrous practices, and the tyrannical abſurd principles of the church of Rome, concerning tranſubſtantiation, purgatory, the authority and infallibility of the Pope, &c. or any other extravagant notion that may creep into the minds of deluded men, and obtain in the world, be renounced, and our faith concerning theſe points in oppoſition to them, be expreſſed in ſcripture-phraſes only, when all theſe deformed monſters are but of modern growth, and both the things themſelves, and the words whereby they are ſignified, were invented after a finiſhing hand was put to the writing of the divine oracles? But if, in order to evade this objection, it be owned, that it is allowable to expreſs the negative part of a Confeſſion in other words than thoſe uſed by the ſacred writers; beſides that they will hereby depart from their general principle, they ſeem to yield the whole cauſe, ſince it would be very eaſy to give ſuch a turn to a creed, that the whole of it may conſiſt of negative articles, ſo framed as to comprehend

prehend and enforce the ſame things which are affirmed by the poſitive parts of a Confeſſion.

In the laſt place, That creeds ought not to be confined to the phraſes of the holy ſcriptures, but that other words may be lawfully uſed, appears from this conſideration, namely, that it is ſimply impoſſible to declare our belief of ſcripture-conſequences, however neceſſary and momentous they be, in the preciſe terms of the Bible; and ſo by this ſcheme it might be rendered impracticable for a church to own her belief of, and profeſs her reſpect for ſome divine truths of the higheſt importance, or to make confeſſion of ſome of the chief articles of our religion; which ſeems alone to be a pretty great abſurdity, and enough of itſelf to overthrow any ſcheme which is juſtly loaded with it.

It would be improper to enter at this time upon queſtions that have of late been agitated, and upon the determination of which ſome ſeem to lay no little weight, viz. How far ſcripture-conſequences are binding upon a man who does not ſee them? If they have in any caſe the ſame authority over our faith with the words of the ſacred oracles, and we be no leſs obliged to receive them? and, laſtly, How far God will charge home upon any man the diſbelief or neglect of thoſe conſequences which he does not perceive? For tho' perhaps it would be no laborious taſk to return an anſwer to them, and ſhew the miſtakes which ſome writers have fallen into upon this head; yet the doing of it would take up too much place in this work; and it is acknowledged on all hands, that there may be ſcripture-conſequences of a very high nature, that truths of this kind may be very important and uſeful in themſelves, and that they may be ſuch as claim a ſteady adherence to them,

and

and a warm zeal and honour from all who perceive them.

I shall only therefore observe, that the resurrection of the dead, which our Saviour demonstrates in this way to the Sadducees; the principal things relating to the immortality of the soul of man, and the state of happiness and misery; the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, and the eternal salvation from sin, and all its fatal attendants, to be purchased by him; the whole design of the Jewish ceremonies and sacrifices, and all the great truths of religion which God intended to lead them to the knowledge of by the help of these external ordinances; in a word, the whole reasoning of the apostle, in that excellent epistle to the Hebrews, and the doctrine contained in the great original promise, *That the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*, which was for so many ages the hope and joy of the church, were all scripture-consequences: and so the Israelites could not have professed their faith of these articles, had they been tied down to the very phrases of the inspired writers, which, as to the external form of them, were evidently calculated for a legal carnal dispensation; that is, they could not have professed the Jewish religion at all. They might indeed, by adhering to the letter of the law, have professed themselves the carnal seed of Abraham, and shewed that they were of the concision: but then they must go no farther; they must beware of confessing, that they were of the spiritual seed of Abraham, and children of the promise. No; the Scribes might justly have accused them of setting up new rules of faith, and contradicting the perfection, sufficiency, and perspicuity, of the sacred writings, had they pretended to distinguish themselves from them, by another profession of their faith, and by expressing their

their belief of what they thought the deſign of all their inſtitutions, and the voice of their whole ordinances, ſo as to confeſs before the world, that they were "of the circumciſion, who worſhipped "God in the ſpirit, and had no confidence in the "fleſh."

It was one great thing which our Saviour blamed in the Phariſees, that, under a pretence of doing honour to Moſes, and adhering to the law, they maintained, that the letter of the law was ſufficient; and that, if a man in his faith and practice kept up to it, there could be no more required of him; whereby they ſtruck at the vitals of religion, and ſtifled the ſpirit of it. I cannot help thinking, that thoſe who exclaim ſo loudly againſt human compoſures, and would receive an aſſent to the letter of the ſcriptures, and a ſubſcription of the phraſes therein contained, by a perſon, (though we be ignorant of his meaning, and he refuſe to explain the ſenſe in which he underſtands them), as a ſufficient teſt of his orthodoxy, or meaſure of Chriſtian or miniſterial communion, build their ſchemes upon the maxims of the Scribes, and ſeem to introduce into the Chriſtian church the old Jewiſh Phariſaiſm.

Theſe are ſome of the native conſequences of the opinions eſpouſed by our adverſaries, and ſuch are the advantages which religion and liberty may expect upon their prevailing in the world. Into ſuch inconſiſtencies and abſurdities we can ſcarce miſs to fall, ſo long as words are regarded more than things; ſo long as that ſubmiſſion, honour, and veneration, due to the ſacred writings, are paid rather to the phraſes than to the truths and doctrines contained in them; and, inſtead of the purity of faith, and the conviction of the underſtanding, empty ſounds are looked upon as a diſtinguiſhing mark of Chriſtianity, and an agree-

ment in words, and combinations of letters, a ſtrong enough foundation for Chriſtian communion.

THERE are two paſſages in two remarkable papers lately publiſhed, which fall in naturally upon this occaſion; and it may not be improper to make a very ſhort obſervation upon them. In the 5th of the *Reaſons for not ſubſcribing the paper offered at Salters-hall, March* 3. 1718-19, publiſhed by the non-ſubſcribers, they ſay, "We have always "thought, that ſuch human declarations of faith "were far from being eligible on their own account, "ſince they tend to narrow the foundations of "Chriſtianity, and to reſtrain that latitude of ex-"preſſion in which our great legiſlator has thought "fit to deliver his will to us."

To reduce Chriſtianity within ſtraiter bounds than our Saviour hath thought fit, is certainly extremely culpable. To fix narrower terms of Chriſtian communion than the author of our religion hath appointed, and exclude our neighbours from the fellowſhip of the ſaints, or the privileges of the church, becauſe they refuſe to comply with thoſe terms, is both uncharitable to our brethren, and a preſumptuous uſurpation upon the prerogative of our great maſter. We are far from pretending to alter the land-marks of Chriſtianity, or build upon any other foundations beſides thoſe which Chriſt and his apoſtles have laid; and whether we have done ſo or not, muſt depend upon an impartial inquiry into the doctrines eſpouſed by us. But it ſeems not eaſy to comprehend what is underſtood by that latitude of expreſſion in which our great legiſlator is ſuppoſed to have delivered his will: for indeed, properly ſpeaking, there may be a latitude of things, of terms of communion, and neceſſary articles of faith; but there can be no ſuch

thing as a latitude of expreſſion; becauſe all words ought to be of a fixed meaning, that is, ought to be of a determinate meaſure, and cannot be ſtretched wider, according to the fancy of the reader: and agreeably hereto, the words of ſcripture have but one meaning; the Holy Ghoſt deſigns by them to repreſent to us ſome determinate doctrine or truth; and if that be miſapprehended, whatever become of the expreſſion, we refuſe, or neglect to receive, that part of the goſpel-revelation.

To imagine that our bleſſed Saviour delivered his will to us in ſuch extended and variable expreſſions, that they might ſuit the palate of all parties, and comprehend every ſect; that they were ſo ſupple as to bend to the notions that this and the other man ſhould take up of the truth pointed at in them; and were of ſuch a latitude, that perſons who thought very differently concerning the doctrines, might ſafely enough aſſent to the expreſſions, and every man explain them his own way; is imagining ſuch a latitude of expreſſion in the ſcriptures, as renders them of no meaning or ſignification that can be depended upon; it is forming them into a noſe of wax, and ſo entirely deſtroying their authority, and counteracting all the valuable ends for which they were delivered to us: and I am afraid, that the words of the non-ſubſcribers may be thought by ſome to look this way, how diſtant ſoever this might be from the intention of many worthy perſons of that number.

The author of the *Occaſional Paper* tells us, "That where men do declare their aſſent to all "the expreſſions in which theſe doctrines are de"livered in ſcripture, though they ſhould not re"ceive, or though it may be they object to ex"plications in unſcriptural words, they are not to "be denied the communion of the Chriſtian "church

" church merely on that account *." It is eaſily acknowledged, that no perſon who receives the fundamental articles of Chriſtianity, and diſclaims all errors that ſtrike at the life and eſſence of the goſpel, can be juſtly denied the communion of the church; but if we abſtract from the doctrines of religion, what force or efficacy can be in an aſſent to the expreſſions of the ſcripture? There is reaſon to ſuſpect, that a perſon means another thing by theſe phraſes than the ſcriptures mean, and really denies the truth revealed in them. To ſuppoſe that an aſſent to the expreſſions will intitle him to church-communion, is to expoſe the Bible to the utmoſt contempt, and, in reality, to make them ſo many charms, whereby a man, without conſidering what he believes in his heart, may be inchanted into orthodoxy. If the ſubſcribing theſe expreſſions do not involve a belief of the truth, and ſignify ſomething that is plain and determinate, it becomes an airy phantom, and, in a literal ſenſe, only a form of ſound words, without the ſubſtance.

In the Confeſſions of our Faith we muſt profeſs things, and not words; and expreſſions aſſented to are to be regarded only upon the account of what is ſignified by them. This is the account which the apoſtle ſeems to give us of this matter: " Hold faſt," ſays he to Timothy, " the " form of ſound words, which thou haſt heard " of me, in FAITH and love which is in Chriſt " Jeſus. THAT GOOD THING which was " committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghoſt, " which dwelleth in us †." It was real *faith*, and *that good thing*, which put life into the *form*

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 3. N° 11. p. 8.
† 2 Tim. i. 13. 14.

of ſound words, and made them what they were; and had he let go *that good thing*, and departed from *the faith*, his *form of ſound words*, and the loudeſt aſſent to ſcripture-expreſſions, would have neither ſecured to him the dignity of his office, nor the communion of ſaints; but they would have had the ſame influence on the aſſenter to theſe expreſſions that the gift of tongues hath on a man who wants charity, have made him *a ſounding braſs and a tinkling cymbal.*

THUS we have endeavoured, in ſeveral inſtances, to lay open the abſurd conſequences, which ſeem to demonſtrate the falſehood of their opinion who would confine all Confeſſions of Faith to the preciſe words and phraſes of the holy ſcriptures; and that it is highly reaſonable and neceſſary for Chriſtians, upon ſome occaſions, to diſtinguiſh themſelves from heretics, and profeſs the purity of the faith in other words and phraſes. It remains that we ſhow more directly, that Confeſſions framed in ſuch a method are not in the leaſt injurious to the dignity and excellency of the holy ſcriptures, and are no wiſe inconſiſtent with the Proteſtant principles of the abſolute perfection, fullneſs, and perſpicuity, of the ſacred oracles, with reſpect to all the concerns of faith and ſalvation. And ſeeing what hath been already advanced may be eaſily applied by any to this purpoſe, we ſhall but very briefly mention two or three conſiderations; each of which, we hope, may by itſelf prove a ſatisfying anſwer to the objection.

That the expreſſions of the ſcripture are not ſufficient for all the ends of Confeſſions of Faith, does not in the leaſt flow from themſelves, nor depend upon any ſuppoſed defect in the holy oracles, which needs to be ſupplied, but is entirely owing

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to the ignorance and wickedneſs of vain and cunning heretics, who pervert their meaning, and impoſe a ſenſe upon them directly contrary to the will and mind of our great legiſlator; and, conſequently, the neceſſity of other phraſes, in order to our giving, or receiving from others, a ſincere and undiſguiſed account of the faith that is embraced, in an age where ſuch corruptions prevail, does not bear the ſmalleſt reflection upon the word of God, but muſt be imputed wholly to the errors and deceits of mankind.

Phraſes which have no determinate ſignification affixed to them, are of no manner of uſe, and give no inſtruction to the hearers; and words which in the mouth of the ſpeaker are of an ambiguous interpretation, and when pronounced by different perſons may ſignify different and contradictory doctrines, methinks can by no man who deals ingenuouſly be depended upon as a ſufficient teſt of a man's orthodoxy, or received as a tolerable argument of his true opinions: and to ſay, that the words of ſcripture are often expoſed to this fate, and meet with ſuch treatment in the world, is to ſay no more than what we have daily experience of, and what is affirmed in direct terms by the apoſtle, 2 Pet. iii. 16.; where he tells us, that "there are many things in the epiſtles of Paul "which they that are unlearned and unſtable "wreſt, as they do alſo the other ſcriptures, unto "their own deſtruction."

Theſe phraſes of the ſacred writers, as they lie in the holy ſcriptures, might be perſpicuous enough, and ſufficiently expreſſive of the doctrines of religion; but ſurely, if we conſider them as uſed by theſe unſtable perſons, wreſted and perverted, they could not poſſibly be a ſatisfying evidence of the purity of their faith. The apoſtle informs us, that the beſt and pureſt things may be

perverted to the worſt purpoſes, ſo that the holy law of the bleſſed God himſelf is made an engine of ſin, to advance its dominion: "But ſin," ſays he, "taking occaſion by the commandment, "wrought in me all manner of concupiſcence." And, "Sin, that it might appear ſin, working "death in me by that which is good, ——— *"

Can it then be juſtly reckoned any diſeſteem of the ſacred writings, to alledge, that the words of them may be ſhaped into a diſguiſe, deſigned to give falſe ornaments, and a deceitful beauty, to the moſt deformed monſters of infidelity, and under a fair appearance to conceal the poiſon and malignity of error? And when theſe phraſes, in themſelves ſo good and innocent, are formed into a covert under which heretics ſcreen themſelves, and a retreat from which they make excurſions into the regions of light and truth; and whither, when attacked by the ſtrongeſt arguments, they flee back for ſhelter; is it a crime to detect them, to pull off the falſe face, and, by a prudent caution, to preſerve ourſelves from the danger of infection from a lurking plague, and the guilt of partaking of other mens ſins, and entertaining communication with the works of darkneſs and error? So that to affirm, that it may be neceſſary, in the public creeds, to make uſe of phraſes that are not to be found in the ſcriptures, is not in the leaſt to alledge, that the ſcriptures are deficient, or the expreſſions of them not full and clear; but only that there are men in the world who wreſt them; and that cunning heretics uſe them in a ſenſe quite different from their genuine meaning; and ſo only make a pretence of them, to lead aſtray unwary ſouls by their fair ſpeeches, aſ-

* Rom. vii. 8. 13.

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ſuming the form, while they have no remains of the power of truth and light.

In the next place, Though it ſhould be aſſerted, that the truths revealed in ſome paſſages of ſcripture may be expreſſed in plainer terms, and ſuch as are not ſo liable to be wreſted by heretics, and that words may be found out, not ſo much expoſed to the diſadvantage of an ambiguous indeterminate meaning, and under which it may be more difficult to conceal a falſe and dangerous opinion; yet this would not be the leaſt reflection upon the perfection and ſufficiency of the ſcriptures; and to think otherwiſe muſt proceed from very miſtaken notions hereof, and from a falſe idea of the Proteſtant principles.

The excellency of any compoſure conſiſts in all the parts of it being exactly ſuited to the ends for which they are deſigned; and agreeably hereto, the abſolute perfection of the holy ſcriptures lies in their having all their parts, every word, every phraſe, proportioned, in the wiſeſt and beſt manner, to the purpoſes of the great legiſlator, and ſo contrived that they are both ſufficient for all the ends of divine revelation, and that they gain theſe ends in the moſt admirable and excellent manner: and it were highly injurious to the glory of him whoſe underſtanding is infinite, and to the dignity and honour of the Bible, to ſuppoſe, that any words of ours can be fitter, or in a better manner expreſſive of goſpel-truths. But then it is affirmed, without proof, that in order to the perfection of any part of the Bible, the doctrine contained in it ſhould be repreſented in the moſt clear and plain manner that could be thought of. For how valuable ſoever a quality this might be thought, if taken ſeparately; yet if we conſider any text in all its circumſtances, and with a relation to the other parts of the Bible, and the complex

plex deſign of divine revelation, perhaps a greater degree of perſpicuity would diminiſh its luſtre, and leſſen the excellency of the whole. God may have wiſe and good purpoſes to accompliſh by the ſcripture, which will make it neceſſary that all the parts of it be not equally clear, nor the phraſes ſo perſpicuous as they might have been. And that this hath obtained in fact, is very evident. Can any body queſtion, whether thoſe places of the Old Teſtament, by which the immortality of the ſoul, the reſurrection of the juſt, the end and meaning of the whole ceremonial law, with many other fundamental articles of their faith, which were revealed to the Jewiſh church, might have been made much clearer, and plainer expreſſions of them found out? They were revealed, indeed, by their ſcriptures; but ſo far were theſe ſcriptures from being expreſſed with the utmoſt perſpicuity, that, long after them, *life and immortality are* ſaid to be *brought to light by the goſpel.*

Is it not evident, that there are phraſes which would expreſs thoſe truths with more clearneſs than our Saviour's parables, though they were levelled principally at the plaineſt things in religion, the practice of it? His diſciples did not underſtand the meaning of them till they were explained in more perſpicuous terms: and yet theſe parables, as delivered in the public aſſemblies, were a part of the holy oracles. Our Saviour himſelf gives us this reaſon of his conduct, Mark iv. 11. "And he ſaid unto them, Unto you it is given to "know the myſteries of the kingdom of God; "but unto them that are without all theſe things "are done in parables:" verſ. 12. "That ſeeing "they may ſee, and not perceive; and hearing "they may hear, and not underſtand; leſt at any "time they ſhould be converted, and their ſins "ſhould be forgiven them."

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Had theſe parabolical ſcriptures been made plainer, they would not have been ſo accurately adjuſted to the legiſlator's intention; and, conſequently, that additional perſpicuity, inſtead of raiſing their excellency, would have proved an evident imperfection.

And the apoſtle tells us expreſsly, that in the writings of Paul *there are ſome things hard to be underſtood;* which things certainly could have been delivered in clearer expreſſions.

The infinitely wiſe God had ſeveral different purpoſes to ſerve, with reſpect to different perſons and circumſtances, by the holy ſcriptures; and the admirable perfection of thoſe divine records muſt not be made to depend upon the utmoſt degree of any one quality, or their fittedneſs to one particular caſe; but it really conſiſts in the frame and diſpoſition of the whole, and all the parts of it, when taken together, being exactly adapted to the complex ſtate and deſign of the goſpel revelation: and it is enough to anſwer all the cavils of adverſaries, with reſpect to the perſpicuity of the Bible, if the neceſſary truths of religion, and thoſe doctrines which God requires the knowledge of from ſincere Chriſtians, be revealed in the ſcripture with that certainty and evidence, that perſons of whatever capacity may attain the aſſured diſcovery of them, in a diligent uſe of all appointed means, and a humble dependence on the enlightening aſſiſtances of the Holy Spirit, who leads thoſe that have ſuch a ſincere and pious diſpoſition into all truth. But then the perſpicuity of ſcripture-expreſſions is calculated for diligence, and not for lazineſs. It is plain enough to be comprehended by a careful and impartial inquirer; but it is not ſo clear but that it may be eaſily miſtaken by a mind biaſſed with prejudices, clouded with paſſions, diſſolved into ſoft pleaſures, or blown up with pride or vanity.

vanity. Nor is it ſuch a clearneſs, that it will be immediately perceived, and give light to a man abandoned to his eaſe, and who will not be at the pains to ſearch after truth. So that the perfection and perſpicuity of the ſcriptures are not of ſuch a nature as to ſuppoſe, that the moſt obvious expreſſions of Chriſtian doctrines are always made uſe of, and that it is impoſſible to fall upon plainer and eaſier phraſes than are to be found in ſome texts.

Were the holy ſcriptures and Confeſſions of Faith calculated for the ſame purpoſes, it were an impious vanity, and a contemptuous impeachment of the word of God, to think any phraſes but ſcriptural ones neceſſary, or that creeds could be better formed in words of our own; ſince that were to imagine, that we could contrive words more adapted to their deſign than thoſe of the Spirit of God were to his. But if the ſcriptures were levelled at another mark than Confeſſions are, and ſo the compoſure of them was to be regulated by different meaſures, then it cannot be the ſmalleſt reflection upon the ſcriptures, that ſome phraſes may be more proper for creeds than the preciſe terms of the Bible; becauſe, though theſe terms were infinitely well ſuited for their own deſign, they needed not be perfectly adjuſted to the intentions of another compoſure.

Now the holy ſcriptures are deſigned for a perpetual and univerſal rule of faith and manners, to all places, in all ages, and with reſpect to Chriſtians of whatſoever language or condition; and therefore the phraſes of them muſt be fitted to this comprehenſive and enlarged view, and muſt not be confined to the ſpecial circumſtances of this age or country. On the contrary, Confeſſions of Faith are of a limited nature: they muſt be adapted to the particular ſtate of nations and of

periods,

periods, to the hereſies which at any time rage with the greateſt fury, the various ſubterfuges of heretics, and the diſguiſes under which they endeavour to conceal themſelves; what ſenſe they uſe words in muſt be examined, and the different turn which their ſchemes and notions may take muſt be conſidered, in order to form a creed aright; and ſo, according to the variety of caſes, ſome phraſes may be proper in one caſe, which in another would entirely miſs the end; and different churches may ſee it fit for them to make alterations in their creeds, and uſe different expreſſions.

Now where is the ſmalleſt injury done to the holy ſcriptures, if it ſhould be aſſerted, that the phraſes of a general univerſal rule are not always the fitteſt for the ſpecial uſes of a particular ſociety; that the words of a human compoſure may better anſwer the exigencies of a particular age or place, and may be more exactly proportioned to the nature of ſome errors, and the circumſtances of ſome heretics, than the ſcriptural phraſes; becauſe theſe were not deſigned for that ſingle caſe, but had a much more extenſive view; while, in the mean time, it is acknowledged, that the words and terms of the Bible are incomparably better adjuſted to the ends of the Holy Ghoſt in inditing them, than any words of man's deviſing can poſſibly be?

But there remains one conſideration further, which we hope will fully clear this matter, and demonſtrate the vanity of the objection, and that the preſent queſtion hath no relation to the excellency or perſpicuity of the holy ſcriptures, nor can have the ſmalleſt influence upon the Proteſtant principles concerning them.

When we ſpeak of the perſpicuity and plainneſs of ſcripture-phraſes, we evidently conſider them as they lie in the ſacred oracles, and as they

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are expreſſions of the Chriſtian doctrine, and of the mind of our great legiſlator; and ſo the only meaning of the Proteſtant principle is, that in the ſcriptures the Holy Ghoſt hath revealed to us the will of God, and the truths of the goſpel, whereof he requires the belief, in ſo ſimple a ſtyle, and in ſo plain a manner, that without any addition, or the authority of human explication, every ordinary Chriſtian, who with ſincerity and diligence ſhall make uſe of the means laid to his hand, may find out the true ſenſe, and attain the knowledge of things pertaining to ſalvation; and, conſequently, that the Bible is of itſelf, independent of tradition, and of the church, a full, perſpicuous, and infallible rule of faith and manners. So that when we ſpeak of the plainneſs and excellency of ſcripture-phraſes, we conſider them as the words of the Holy Ghoſt, and expreſſions of the mind of God to us.

In which ſenſe none ſhall be readier than we to acknowledge the certainty and evidence of ſcripture-expreſſions; that they are as clear declarations of the mind of the Holy Spirit, concerning the truths of religion, as the moſt determinate phraſes of any human Confeſſion can be, and incomparably better adjuſted to the ends of divine revelation; and that there is no manner of ambiguity and uncertainty in their ſignification. For my part, I always thought many texts of ſcripture as plain and poſitive declarations of the divinity of our Saviour, and his being one God with the Father, as could be invented; and that the words of the Bible are as clear and determinate, not only with regard to this, but alſo to the other important articles of our faith, as the words of any creed are. So that, had the very phraſes made uſe of in the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, to aſſirm the divinity of our Saviour, and contradict the

Arian and Socinian hereſies, been inſerted in the ſcriptures by the inſpired writers, I ſhould not have thought them more clear and evident, or freer from ambiguity, or the hazard of being taken in different ſenſes by different perſons, than the expreſſions which the divine writers actually made uſe of really are. So that thus far, I hope, we entertain as high notions of the ſufficiency and perſpicuity of the ſcripture phraſes, as our adverſaries can poſſibly do; and are far from comparing with them, even in the point of clearneſs, the words of any human compoſure, or the creed of any church whatſoever.

Why then do we make uſe of other phraſes in the declarations of our faith, and upon that very account, that thoſe of the Bible are too variable and indeterminate, and ſo liable to an ambiguous ſignification, that an aſſent to them would not be a ſufficient teſt of a miniſter's orthodoxy? And how is this reconcileable with what hath been juſt now acknowledged concerning the clearneſs and fullneſs of the ſcriptural phraſes?

The caſe is very evident. Confeſſions of Faith are not immediately deſigned to give an account of what the Holy Ghoſt ſays concerning ſuch an article, but of what ſuch a perſon or church believes; and ſo the words of a Creed or Confeſſion are not expreſſions of the will of the Holy Ghoſt, but of our faith, and of the mind of the ſubſcriber. And when a conſideration is had of the proper terms in which creeds ſhould be drawn up, the queſtion is not, Whether ſuch phraſes be very plain ſignifications of the mind of God revealed in the Bible? but, Whether they will be a clear enough expreſſion of your mind, who make the profeſſion of your faith? for it is very poſſible, that theſe words, as they lie in the ſcripture, may be very evident, and without any ambiguity; and

yet, when made uſe of by you, they may be of a very intricate and uncertain meaning: ſo that it is the ſenſe of the ſpeaker, or ſubſcriber of a Confeſſion, which is the thing wanted; and if we be not informed what meaning he affixes to them, how plain ſoever the ſcriptural phraſes are in themſelves, with reſpect to the preſent caſe, they may be very obſcure, and evidently inſufficient.

Every body in the leaſt acquainted with language muſt be ſenſible, that the preciſe ſame words may have different ſignifications, and ſhould be interpreted differently, according to the circumſtances of the perſons who uſe them, their way of writing, the age in which they live, and the ſect or party to which they belong; that in the mouth or in the writings of one perſon, they may have a plain eaſy meaning, level to every body's capacity; whereas, in thoſe of another, they may be very intricate and ambiguous; and except he uſe clearer expreſſions, it may be impoſſible to attain any aſſurance of his ſentiments.

The ſignification of terms is altered by a variety of cauſes, of which it will be ſufficient to give one inſtance. Theſe words, ſo famous in theological controverſies, *merit*, *ſatisfaction*, *prieſt*, *altar*, *ſacrifice*, *&c.* have been applied to extremely different purpoſes, and the meaning of them came at length to be entirely changed; ſo that theſe words have a very different ſignification in the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, &c. from what what they obtain in the compoſures of Bellarmine, Suarez, and their aſſociates.

Now ſhould perſons living in theſe diſtant ages have ſubſcribed creeds compoſed by them, wherein ſuch phraſes frequently occurred, their aſſent to them would have been ſo far from teſtifying the harmony of their faith, or laying a foun-

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dation for church-communion; that, on the contrary, with one man ſuch a ſubſcription would have ſignified that he was an orthodox Chriſtian, with another man it would have been declaring that he was a Papiſt.

And had theſe terms been aſſented to by a perſon living in ſome of the intermediate ages, when there was not a total change made in their ſignification, and it was uncertain whether they ſhould be underſtood according to the uſe which Cyprian or which Suarez makes of them, it ſeems evident, that his ſubſcription would have been abſolutely uſeleſs; becauſe theſe phraſes were then very ambiguous, and ſo extremely unfit to give a clear repreſentation of a perſon's faith. But will this in the leaſt reflect on the language of the primitive fathers? or will it argue that they did not write clearly and plainly, becauſe afterwards the phraſes uſed by them became indiſtinct and dubious?

I know, that words in the ſcripture are taken in the moſt obvious ſenſe, and that which, conſidering all circumſtances, muſt be their ſignification, according to the exacteſt rules of the trueſt criticiſm. I know what the fixed and determinate meaning of ſuch phraſes was at that time, and am ſure, that the Holy Ghoſt inſpiring the prophets and apoſtles, could never miſtake the juſt ſenſe of words, or take them in a ſtrained foreign way; that he never could have a deſign to hide his mind, and diſguiſe his doctrine by ambiguous and deceitful terms; that the ſcriptures dictated by him were perfectly harmonious in all their parts, adorned with a noble ſimplicity, and free from any degree of artifice; and therefore the expreſſions of the ſacred oracles are an open, plain, and impartial repreſentation of the doctrines contained in them, and are ſimple and fixed in their

ſignification, ſo as they may be underſtood by all who ſincerely apply their minds to the diſcovery of the truth.

Upon the other hand, when theſe phraſes are made uſe of in Confeſſions, they are the words of fallible men, and, it may be, of cunning heretics, who want only ſo fair a vizard as the form and appearance of ſcripture-expreſſions, under which they may conceal the poiſon of their errors, and impoſe upon the ſimple, who may, and certainly on one ſide or other do, miſtake the genuine and original ſenſe of theſe ſcripture-terms, and, conſequently, in their mouths they expreſs very different things from what they do as they lie in the Bible.

We have the moſt convincing experience that theſe phraſes, in the age and country where the creed is formed, are underſtood variouſly by ſeveral men; one of them means one thing, and another the quite contrary, when he pronounces them: in which caſe, it is evident, they are dark ambiguous words, the ſignification whereof is to be determined, that they are not at all ſufficiently plain expreſſions of a man's faith, that it is impoſſible, without an explication, to know what is meant by them; and that more clear and eaſy terms muſt be made uſe of, in order to attain any of the valuable and neceſſary ends of Confeſſions.

But then this hath really nothing to do with the diſpute concerning the perfection of the ſcriptures; for thoſe very phraſes which are obſcure, and ſcarce intelligible expreſſions of the thoughts and opinions of a man, or a ſociety, now-a-days, conſidering the different nature and circumſtances, as we have juſt now in part repreſented; yet may be, and are, very diſtinct and clear expreſſions of the mind of God, as they lie in the ſcriptures; becauſe it is really this difference of perſons and circum-

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ſtances which occaſions the obſcurity, and makes the words unfit in one caſe which are made uſe of with infinite wiſdom in another.

Though, therefore, we with confidence aſſirm, that other words and phraſes are abſolutely neceſſary to give a fair and plain confeſſion of the faith of Chriſtians, and diſtinguiſh betwixt thoſe who receive the truths of the goſpel, and ſuch as have fallen away from them, and been led aſide by errors and hereſies, conſidering the preſent ſtate of religious controverſies, and the ambiguous ſenſe in which ſcripture-phraſes are at preſent uſed by different perſons; yet ſince we maintain, in perfect conſiſtence herewith, the abſolute ſufficiency, fullneſs, and perſpicuity, of the ſacred oracles; that the phraſes in them are choſen with admirable wiſdom, and in all reſpects ſuited to the nature and deſigns of a book that was to be a complete and infallible rule of faith and manners to all the members of the church in all ages; and that thoſe terms are, without the authority of any human explication, clear and certain expreſſions of the mind of the Holy Ghoſt, it is evident we act in a perfect agreement with the Proteſtant principles, and are not chargeable with the ſmalleſt appearance of diſregard to the honour and excellency of the divine writings.

Every body in the leaſt acquainted with the principles of the church of Rome, and the ſtate of the controverſy, muſt ſee, that the only diſpute is, Whether without the interpoſition of the church, and the help of tradition, the ſcriptures are of themſelves a ſufficiently full and plain declaration of the mind of God, and the doctrines of ſalvation, to the whole body of Chriſtians? but not at all, Whether the phraſes of ſcripture are a clear and plain enough expreſſion of the mind of men, and of the opinions of this and the

other particular church or perſon? nor, Whether it may not be neceſſary for them, upon ſome occaſions, to confeſs Chriſt, and *give a reaſon of the hope that is in them*, in other words? This is a queſtion the Papiſts are not in the leaſt concerned in; nor can the determination of it have the ſmalleſt influence upon the controverſy betwixt the Proteſtants and them relating to this point.

It ſeems then to flow from an entire miſtake of the queſtion, that our opinion concerning the phraſes and terms in which human Confeſſions may and ought to be expreſſed, is alledged to be a departure from the Proteſtant principles, and an approach to the Popiſh maxims; and that ſo very unconnected and diſtant controverſies as theſe are ſhould be ſo unreaſonably confounded together.

As a very great injury is done to all the Reformed churches who make the ſame uſe of Confeſſions that we do, and they are treated in a method which hath as little claim to good manners and modeſty as to juſtice, when they are ſo loudly accuſed of ſelf contradiction, and of detraction from the holy ſcriptures; ſo an affront is indeed offered to the Bible, when an imaginary regard to the excellency and perfection of it is made a handle to promote the intereſts of a cauſe in which it is no wiſe concerned, and to influence the minds of the ſober and more religious perſons, who will no doubt be extremely moved by every thing which hath the leaſt appearance of ſullying the glory of divine revelation, or contradicting the ſufficiency and perfection of the word of God. Nor is any honour done to the ſcriptures, to drag them into the field of controverſy, and out of their dignity, excellency, and perſpicuity, to buſk up a form of truth and godlineſs, under which notions of a very

very different nature might appear more plauſible, and make deeper impreſſions upon Chriſtians.

HAVING ſo fully conſidered theſe two great objections againſt creeds, which contain almoſt the whole ſtrength of our adverſaries, and endeavoured to vindicate the principles and practice of our church in this matter, from the charge of tyranny, or any mixture of ſpiritual uſurpation over the conſciences of mankind, and the unalienable right of private judgement, and from the imputation of any thing that is diſhonourable to the ſacred writings, or contradictory to the Proteſtant principles, there remains only an objection or two of leſſer moment to be conſidered; and they will be the eaſier removed, becauſe now in our reaſoning we may proceed upon the ſuppoſition, that Confeſſions are perfectly agreeable to the liberties of mankind, and to the dignity and perfection of the word of God.

(3.) THE third kind of objections which are brought againſt Confeſſions are founded upon the bad influence which it is alledged they have on the intereſts both of learning and religion. It is ſaid, That the confining men to the belief of certain articles, or at leaſt depriving them of worldly advantages, ſuch as their ſtipends, upon their publiſhing opinions contrary to the public ſtandards, is a mighty bias upon their underſtandings, ſtraitens them in their inquiries after truth, prepoſſeſſes with prejudices, and prevents great and noble advances in knowledge; that hereby men have a great argument to become hypocrites, and ſo to be loſt to all religion, while they are afraid to declare their real ſentiments, and tempted to counterfeit a belief of doctrines with which their temporal

poral fortunes and conveniencies are ſo cloſely connected; that in ſuch circumſtances an uncommon progreſs in any part of theological learning is ſo far from being encouraged, that, on the contrary, it ſeems a crime to be wiſer and more knowing than others, or to diſcover errors and miſtakes in the opinions of the church, and the compoſures of fallible men; that ſuch means of preſerving the purity of the Chriſtian faith, as creeds are alledged by their admirers to be, will do at leaſt more harm to true religion than good; becauſe, according to our ſcheme concerning Confeſſions, the ſame methods will be followed by all ſocieties and churches, of whatever principles and party they be; and, conſequently, ſuch Confeſſions will tend as much to the diſadvantage of ſound doctrine, and to the ſecurity of error, as it can do to the preſervation of truth, where it is eſtabliſhed; and that Paganiſm, Mahometaniſm, and Popery, &c. having got into the poſſeſſion of the public chairs and pulpits in the far greateſt number of countries, hereſy and darkneſs will be greater gainers by this ſcheme than light and purity.

A great many things might be obſerved upon this ſubject, were it proper on this occaſion to give a full illuſtration of it; but it is hoped the few conſiderations following may be ſufficient for the vindication of Confeſſions.

Should we acknowledge, that Confeſſions of Faith have been ſometimes abuſed, and been made the occaſion of the evils complained of; that covetous and fearful perſons have been induced to conceal their real ſentiments, by the proſpect of the diſadvantages they might be expoſed to, ſhould it be known that they had departed from the received doctrine; and that men of learning have been in ſome places induced to ſmother uſeful and

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new diſcoveries, and thereby have loſt them to the republic of letters: yet this will be no good argument againſt the uſe of Confeſſions, and the benefits which may be reaped by them; becauſe the beſt and nobleſt things in the world have had the ſame fate, and been perverted by the corruptions of mankind to the moſt unworthy purpoſes. The law of God itſelf, as we formerly mentioned, however pure and holy, became an inſtrument of ſin, whereby it wrought death *. The moſt meek and peaceable religion that ever appeared in the world, gave riſe to the moſt furious animoſities, and unnatural cruelties; it ſent *fire and ſword abroad upon the earth*, and put the neareſt relations, even parents and children, at variance †. The grace of God hath been turned into laſciviouſneſs ‡; and the great foundation of the goſpel, the croſs of Chriſt, was *to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs* ‖. Were, therefore, all theſe things to be rejected? or could theſe evils, which ſprung from the depravity and weakneſs of mankind, be juſtly attributed to the innocent occaſions of them?

The temporalities of church-officers, or the ſtipends which any ſociety may beſtow upon their miniſters, and which they cannot enjoy but upon condition of their ſubſcribing the eſtabliſhed Confeſſions, and adhering to the doctrine contained in them, are the chief things to be conſidered in this argument; becauſe it is the apprehenſion of the loſs of theſe temporalities which is the occaſion of the alledged diſadvantages to religion and learning. Now let us plainly ſtate the caſe, and ſee if the opinion of our adverſaries be not incomparably

* Rom. vii. 10. — 13.
† Matth. x. 34. 35.
‡ Jude, verſ. 4.
‖ 1 Cor. i. 23.

more

more unreaſonable, and expoſed to much greater inconveniencies.

A ſociety, in order to propagate and increaſe the knowledge of what they think the faith of the goſpel, give ſuch an encouragement to a miniſter, that a perſon may get into this office, he may be tempted to diſſemble his true opinions, and make a falſe profeſſion of his faith; therefore, to prevent this, that ſociety muſt beſtow the ſame encouragement upon him, whatever turn of thought he follow, though that ſhould lead him neceſſarily to deſtroy that very cauſe, the promoting of which was the only reaſon why ſuch a benefice was granted to any body.

I have an eſteem and honour for a man becauſe of his religious qualities; I value the purity of his light and knowledge, the probity of his manners, and the ſacred regard to truth and piety which give a luſtre to the whole of his life: another, to get into my favourable thoughts, plays the hypocrite, puts a diſguiſe upon his opinions, which he thinks I would believe heterodox, and imitates the appearance of a devotion which does not warm his heart, and inſpire his affections; therefore, to prevent this, I muſt remove the temptation from him, by ſhowing an equal regard to virtue and vice, truth and error; nor muſt I place my eſteem, or beſtow favours, more upon the moſt excellent Chriſtian than the moſt profligate wretch. Theſe are the native conſequences, and ſuch is the life and ſpirit which give force to this objection againſt Confeſſions; which is enough to ſhow the weakneſs of it.

An inconveniency muſt always be of leſs moment than an abſurdity. Upon one ſide, it can only be alledged, that by eſtabliſhing Confeſſions we do a thing which, however juſt and neceſſary it be in our opinion, yet is acknowledged by us to be

be liable to abuſe, and that, through the corruptions of mankind, it may have bad effects; but, on the other hand, if this be neglected, we do a thing which appears directly contrary to our conſciences, and inconſiſtent with the duty of all Chriſtian ſocieties, to make uſe of the neceſſary means of profeſſing the purity of their own faith, and trying the qualifications of their miniſters; which laſt is incomparably more forcible, and muſt determine us, whatever accidental conſequences may accompany it.

According to the principles of our Confeſſion, every man ſhould ſearch after the truth with the utmoſt impartiality, attend to the voice of divine revelation, though it may ſound very differently in his ears from the public ſtandard of any fallible church, and not ſuffer his conſcience to be bribed by his intereſt, or the light of the goſpel to be overclouded by the miſts and vapours of temporal eaſe and felicity. It is baſe and inglorious for any perſon to diſſemble the truth when he diſcovers it, or neglect any proper means of ſpreading it in the world, becauſe thereby he may diſoblige the majority, and loſe their favour. But if, notwithſtanding theſe conſiderations, any ſhould be found of ſo deſpicable a ſpirit, as to be bribed by theſe temporalities, and prefer them to truth and conſcience, the whole blame ought to be laid upon himſelf; and it can never be ſuppoſed, that to prevent it all ſocieties and churches muſt be deprived of their undiſputed rights, and forced to act directly contrary to their judgements, with reſpect to the doctrinal qualifications of their miniſters.

This way of reaſoning made uſe of by the adverſaries of Confeſſions, if it were puſhed as far as it might, would pull up the roots of all religion, and enervate the plaineſt duties of Chriſtianity.

nity. And indeed perſons of libertine principles, and thoſe who uſurp the name they have ſo little juſt claim to, of free thinkers, improve it for this very purpoſe.

They obſerve, that education gives a mighty bias to the underſtandings of mankind, and hath a great influence in forming their principles; that the far greateſt part of the world lies buried in ignorance, and embraces a falſe religion; and, conſequently, education, with the greateſt number, gives them an early prejudice againſt truth, and prepoſſeſſes their tender minds in favour of error and idolatry. From this diſadvantageous influence which education is alledged to have upon religion, they will conclude, that there ought to be no ſuch thing practiſed by parents; that children ſhould not be trained up in the belief of a ſet of principles, but left entirely to their own judgement when they advance in years.

But is not this to contradict the expreſs commands of our great legiſlator? "Train up a child "in the way he ſhould go, and when he is old "he will not depart from it *." "And ye fathers, "provoke not your children to wrath; but bring "them up in the nurture and admonition of the "Lord †." The judgement which God makes of Abraham is recorded to his honour: "I know "him, that he will command his children, and "his houſehold after him, and they ſhall keep "the way of the Lord, to do juſtice and judge-"ment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham "that which he hath ſpoken of him ‡." And the fatal conſequence of a neglect of this duty is laid before us by the wiſe man: "The rod and "repoof give wiſdom; but a child left to him-

* Prov. xxii. 6. † Epheſ. vi. 4. ‡ Gen. xviii. 19.

"ſelf,

"ſelf, bringeth his mother to ſhame *." And is it not to diſobey the voice of nature, with reſpect to the common principles of religion, which are diſcoverable by his light? Yea, it might be eaſily proved, that, according to this way of reaſoning, parents ſhould beſtow no care upon their children, in order to form their minds to virtue and knowledge, nor give them any part of a polite education; which were to debaſe mankind into the condition of brutes; and, in order to prevent prejudices and prepoſſeſſions, deſtroy thought, and extinguiſh reaſon.

So that our adverſaries who make this objection againſt Confeſſions, ſeem to imitate the method of the Stoics. As theſe did not regulate the paſſions, and render them uſeful, but endeavoured to root them up; ſo they, in order to ſecure an impartial judgement, and prevent the inconveniencies which Chriſtianity might ſuffer from the vaſt ſuperiority of numbers on the ſide of its enemies, were this uſe of creeds and articles of faith allowed to mankind, would confound us into meaſures which overturn all religion, and make the plaineſt duties of it of none effect.

There are ſuch things as truth and orthodoxy in the world; and it were extremely unkind, to fancy, that ſuch ſocieties as may have embraced them, ſhould be deprived of the juſt and neceſſary means of preſerving them pure and uncorrupted, and robbed of what we have proved to be the natural right of all churches and upon the exerciſe of which they may think the ſucceſs and deſign of the miniſtry do in a great meaſure depend; becauſe thoſe who have erred from the truth, may abuſe ſuch compoſures as Confeſ-

* Prov. xxix. 15.

ſions are to bad purpoſes, and a corrupt church may thereby endeavour to maintain the miſtakes and hereſies which they have fallen into.

It is extremely hard, ſometimes, to determine which is the moſt prudent and ready way to promote religion, and bring over a people who are *ſtrangers to the commonwealth of Iſrael*, and what meaſures will prove leaſt hazardous to the intereſt of Chriſtianity. But this methinks may be received as a maxim, That prudence, and dexterity, and politics, can only find place in things which are otherwiſe indifferent; they can never furniſh objections againſt the dictates of conſcience, and the reaſon of the thing. Whatever church, therefore, is perſuaded, that they are obliged, by the laws of God and nature, to try the ſpirits to which they hearken, and to have ſome tolerable aſſurance, that thoſe perſons are poſſeſſed of the neceſſary qualities for that office, who are received as their ſpiritual rulers, and particularly that they ſhould know whether their doctrine be of God; and if that church alſo be convinced, that without an aſſent given by him to ſuch and ſuch articles of faith in plain and determinate words, and, as at preſent things obtain in the world, in other than preciſely ſcriptural phraſes, there can be no juſt ſatisfaction had as to their religious principles; and that a ſubſcription to ſuch a Confeſſion is the beſt or the only way to manifeſt the purity of their faith, and diſtinguiſh them from heretics; in all which that church would, as we hope hath been proved, think very right; it is plain, that no alledged inconveniencies to religion and learning muſt diſſuade her from adhering to Confeſſions, which ſhe may ſecurely do, and leave the event of things to the over ruling providence of the infinitely wiſe and good governor of the world.

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In the next place, Notwithſtanding of the authority which our church gives her Confeſſion, ſince it is not made a term of Chriſtian communion, or a qualification for any civil poſt, it is evident, that our practice can, at the utmoſt, be alledged to have a bad influence upon eccleſiaſtical officers only, and prove a hinderance of new diſcoveries in theology only by them: for the laity, as they are uſually called, are left at a perfect liberty to improve it; they may contribute to the higheſt advances in religion, make what progreſs they can in the ſearch of truth, reform what is amiſs in religion, rectify the notions of Chriſtians, and manifeſt the falſehood and uncertainty of the eſtabliſhed articles of faith, without the ſmalleſt reſtraint or bias upon their impartial underſtandings, from the fear of temporal diſadvantages did they recede from the ſtandard of public orthodoxy. And methinks with us we ſhall believe it no inconveniency to Chriſtianity, if the miniſters of the church, who receive maintenance from it, beſtow their labours in the defence and improvement of the principles of the Reformation, what we think the faith of the goſpel; and continue to do ſo, till we be perſuaded, that there are better and more agreeable to the word of God, to be embraced in their ſtead; while the other members of the church will furniſh out crow of freethinkers, for the diſcovery of new truths, and the forming Chriſtianity on a newer and better model.

I ſhould be glad theſe gentlemen who are ſo extremely zealous, that all public teachers may enjoy the ſame liberty poſſeſſed by themſelves, whoſe underſtandings are not fettered and prejudiced by human Confeſſions, would give the world an experimental argument of the great advantage ſuch an unreſtrained licence would be to the church,

by their new diſcoveries of truth, and uncommon progreſs in learning; and not afford occaſion of obſerving, that the moſt part of theſe adventurers, produce nothing but any ſchemes that have no foundation in ſcripture or reaſon, ſpeculations and conjectures which tend more to ſwell them with vanity and conceit of their own fancies, and to diſorder the imaginations of mankind, than either to reform the lives, or enlighten the underſtandings of Chriſtians with ſolid and uſeful knowledge; and that as great improvements have been made in all the parts of learning which have any relation to divinity by thoſe who were fully convinced of the advantage and juſtice of Confeſſions, as by any of their oppoſers.

But it will be perhaps a more ſolid and ſerious argument, that religion and learning cannot eaſily ſuffer ſo much damage as is apprehended from the authority of Confeſſions, and their being made a term of miniſterial communion by the churches of Chriſt, That though the loſs of the public benefice, and the fear of any other diſadvantages which attend a departure from the ſtandard of orthodoxy, may poſſibly prevail with ſome to conceal what they think truth, and ſmother thoſe diſcoveries which they would have communicated to the world had the ſhackles of human creeds been knocked off them; yet they can have this effect only upon mean and cowardly ſpirits, that are void of true piety, and more under the ſlaviſh dominion of their eaſe and pleaſures than the power of an immortal life.

They will have no influence upon good men, who have devoted themſelves to the glory of God and the honour of religion. Theſe, though poſſeſſed of a ſtipend, which none can enjoy but thoſe who adhere to the eſtabliſhed Confeſſions, or continue in that faith which is embraced by their

their congregations, will be ready to entertain with joy any new light that may irradiate their ſouls: as they value advances in the knowledge of the Son of God more than an increaſe of their treaſures, and diſcern a beauty in truth ſuperior to the charms of this world, the rays of it will ſhine in upon them with too ſtrong and permanent a brightneſs to be overclouded by all the vapours and miſts which can ariſe from their temporalities. As they will never ſubſcribe a Confeſſion, but when perſuaded in their conſciences of the conformity of its articles to divine revelation; ſo they will with courage oppoſe themſelves to it when convinced of their error: they will not be afraid openly to abandon it, and will prove as zealous in promoting what they now ſee to be the mind of God in the ſcriptures, as if there had never been ſuch a thing as a human creed in the world. So that our practice as to Confeſſions will prevent no new diſcoveries of truth, nor any improvement in knowledge, by perſons endued with theſe noble qualities; nor will it in the leaſt hinder the diffuſing of that light through the world, ſince, according to the principles laid down in the beginning, there is no perſecution allowed, nor any forcible methods to hinder the preaching of the truths which may be diſcovered, and recommending them by all the ſtrength of ſcripture and reaſon.

Now it is men only of this temper and diſpoſition that are fit to diſcover truth, and rectify abuſes; it is from them only that the world can expect a reformation of churches which may have departed from the faith of the goſpel, and polluted their creeds by an impure mixture of error; and it is by their labours that light and purity can expect to make conqueſts in the minds of men, and prevail over inveterate deluſions. Men who are

thus ſincerely devoted to God, and prefer heaven to this world, will make the moſt impartial ſearches into truth; and having their minds purified from the baſer paſſions which govern others, and raiſed above the airy phantoms of greatneſs, and riches, and popular applauſe, their underſtandings will be freer from prejudices of every kind, their inquiries will be more modeſt, ſincere, and diligent; the heavenly light of pure doctrine will make the eaſieſt paſſage, and find the beſt entertainment from ſpirits, whoſe tempers and affections are ſo ſuited to the nature and condition of thoſe ſuperior regions of glory and purity: and as ſuch will be in a peculiar manner diſpoſed to grow in the knowledge of God, and improve in ſolid and uſeful theological learning; ſo they will be animated by the warmeſt concern for the intereſts of truth, whenever they perceive it, and with the moſt vigorous zeal will contend for it, and diffuſe the rays of that light which God hath cauſed to ſhine into their ſouls. And what prejudice can the hitherto unanimous practice of the Reformed churches as to their Confeſſions do to learning? or how does it tend to prevent the moſt uſeful and important diſcoveries, when it will not in the leaſt influence any that can be made by the perſons we have now mentioned?

It was by men of ſo diſintereſted and heroic ſpirits that ever religion gained any thing in the world. The holy apoſtles and primitive Chriſtians were of this temper, and animated by theſe generous and exalted principles; and thus they were fitted for the defence and propagation of the goſpel. The greateſt temporal loſſes did not make them ſmother the truth; nor could the terrors of blood and violence hinder them to proclaim aloud the tidings of ſalvation: perſecution only put an edge on their heavenly zeal, and enabled them with the

the greater joy and triumph to ſurmount the moſt formidable difficulties.

Such alſo God employed at the Reformation to revive the decayed intereſts of religion, and rectify the diſorders that had ſpread themſelves through all the parts of the Romiſh religion. Our fathers were of a brave diſintereſted ſpirit; their ſouls were connaturalized unto divine things, and under the power of another world; and therefore, when the light of the Reformation, that *day-ſpring from on high*, overſhadowed them, the influence of corrupted creeds, the canons of councils, and the decrees of Popes, the loſs of temporalities, and the cruelty of the ſevereſt perſecution, did not prevent their abandoning the church of Rome, and promoting the bleſſed change with the moſt vigorous zeal.

Truth and religion flouriſhed under all theſe diſadvantages. The apoſtles indeed had reaſon to complain of their ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake, the murdering and torturing them for differing from the empire in their ſentiments being a manifeſt incroachment upon the liberties of mankind, and a perſecution altogether unjuſtifiable: but then where did they ever pretend to the emoluments of the Heathen prieſts, or graſp at the revenues of the temples? Did they imagine, that the Pagans, before they were converted, ſhould take away the revenues from their own prieſts, and beſtow them upon the Chriſtian miniſters? or did they inſinuate, that it was a loſs to religion and learning that ſo ſelf contradictory a ſcheme did not obtain? They thought indeed, that *they who ſerved at the altar ſhould live by the altar*; but did they expect that perſons were to ſet bread upon that altar who did not worſhip at it. No; they knew that men muſt firſt be converted

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to Chriſtianity before they heaped favours upon the teachers of it.

Let us ſee how forcible this objection is with reſpect to the pretended loſſes which religion and learning may ſuſtain from the reſtraints which Confeſſions lay upon eccleſiaſtical officers. Why, they may hinder the world from obtaining new diſcoveries in divinity from men of narrow covetous ſpirits, who prefer a ſtipend to light and purity, whoſe ſouls are ſo poſſeſſed by the baſeſt and moſt inglorious paſſions, timorouſneſs, and worldly-mindedneſs, that, rather than be expoſed to temporal inconveniencies, they will counteract their conſciences, ſtifle truth, and profeſs with the mouth what they abhor in their ſouls. By this means, perhaps, a ſtop may be put to alterations in an eſtabliſhed creed, by men who have not the courage to declare their principles, nor dare oppoſe the majority, but, it ſeems, look upon temporalities to be the moſt perſuaſive motives, and never deſign to ſtand it out againſt ſo ſtrong an argument.

How unlikely is it that ſuch men would ever be ſerviceable to religion, were there no manner of reſtraints, even not that of Confeſſions, upon them? or that the changes they would make would be in favour of truth? They ſeem utterly unfit ſubjects for the purified light of faith, and not at all calculated, either to receive it themſelves, or convey it into the world; and upon ſuch error and hereſy were much more ready to make an impreſſion.

With what ſcorn, then, and contempt, may Chriſtianity look down upon the proffers of ſuch unworthy and inſignificant votaries? how ſmall advantage can truth ever expect from their diſcoveries? and how little need we be diſguſted at the uſe of Confeſſions, though, whenever a church is ſo unhappy as to be plagued with ſuch miniſters, thoſe

thoſe Confeſſions may be an argument with them, to keep their diſcoveries to themſelves, and not enlighten the world with them.

I am ſure it is incomparably more probable, that any unjuſtifiable reſtraints upon theſe men will rather prevent the diſcovery of error (if we may uſe the phraſe) than of truth. There are very powerful arguments, with people of ſome tempers, beſides the love of a reformation, which may engage them to depart from the public ſtandard, and publiſh ſchemes of their own. A natural levity and inconſtancy of mind, that cannot remain long fixed upon any thing; a warmth of imagination, and ſprightlineſs of fancy, which will be fruitful of new diſcoveries that others have not attended to; a fond conceit of one's ſelf, and a notion that we are wiſer and more clear ſighted than our neighbours; a contempt of what is commonly received, and an ambition to diſtinguiſh ourſelves from the inferior part of mankind, who have not ſuch a freedom and elevation of mind as we have; the glory which a new ſcheme furniſhes to its author, if it happen to take in the world, and the applauſes and homage which are paid by his admirers to the head of a ſucceſsful party, are all plentiful ſources from which unknown hypotheſes and new improvements in divinity may overflow the world.

From theſe motives, it is very likely, that any new diſcoveries, and alterations in the received faith or worſhip, would be made by the men we have deſcribed; and therefore, had we no other uſe for Confeſſions, a regard to truth, and to the peace of ſociety, would make us value them as means of curbing the paſſions, and ſtopping up ſuch impure ſtreams as muſt ſpring from ſo corrupt a fountain, and will much more probably

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poiſon the minds of men, than refreſh and nouriſh them.

There remains one conſideration, which, we hope, will be a full and clear anſwer to the objection. When it is brought as an argument to perſuade any church to lay aſide the uſe of Confeſſions, that ſuch reſtraints are a great hindrance to farther advances in knowledge, and are accompanied with mighty prejudices to religion and learning, ſuch things will be underſtood as that church will think real prejudices; and the diſcoveries which would otherwiſe be made muſt be ſuch as the ſociety will value and deſire to promote: otherwiſe the preventing them can never be urged with them as an argument againſt their Confeſſions.

But now we are, what every church muſt neceſſarily be with reſpect to their own ſtandard, fully convinced, that religion and learning can no wiſe be ſo well promoted as by a conformity to our Confeſſion, and by men who maintain the principles which it teaches; and that, ſo far as any deviate from them, they wander out of the paths of true knowledge, and it becomes the more improbable that Chriſtian learning can be improved by their labours.

Our Confeſſions cannot be alledged to have the leaſt bad influence upon the higheſt advances in ſtudies agreeable to them. They do not lay the ſmalleſt reſtraint upon miniſters to explain the ſcriptures with greater force and evidence, to diſcover new arguments, whereby the truth may be vindicated with the greateſt dexterity, and the doctrines and commands of Chriſtianity recommended to the faith and practice of mankind, in their brighteſt glory and lovelieſt excellency. They may be as knowing in the original languages, ancient cuſtoms, eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, and all other

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parts of theological learning, and improve them to as great advantage, as they are able. They may reason with as much closeness and perspicuity, and be as cautious to use a weak uncertain argument as they desire. They may fall upon the newest and best ways of answering objections, and putting an end to controversies in the most ingenious and clear manner; and in all these things, a man is at perfect liberty, without any bias from the authority of creeds, to go beyond his neighbours, and excel the rest of the church.

No disadvantage is done to any new discoveries, except those that may be designed for the defence and propagation of doctrines contrary to the public standard. Now it is plain, so long as any society remains convinced of the truth thereof, they must look upon all such discoveries to be directly contrary to the interest of religion, or to the growth of true and solid learning; and all the seeming learning and labours which tend this way, must be thought by them steps towards real ignorance, and so far an extinguishing the light of truth.

I may admire the works of those from whom I differ in other respects, and acknowledge the great benefits that our common religion may receive from their studies; but so long as I am, for example, what the world calls a Calvinist, and in my conscience fully convinced of the divine original of the principles which distinguish that party, I cannot help believing, that these labours which are designed to oppose Calvinism, must be in so far opposite to truth and knowledge, and that they can only tend to improve learning, falsely so called, to the growth of what the Apostle names *philosophy and vain deceit* *.

* Col. ii. 8.

And

And while this is the view which a church hath of things, muſt ſhe not think that the reſtraints of her Confeſſions are the ſureſt means to promote true and valuable learning, inſtead of being a hindrance to it? And is it not a palpable abſurdity, to ſuppoſe the objection of our adverſaries ſhould be of any weight with her, when ſhe is convinced that a contrary management would only tend to diſcover to the world new arts of ſophiſtry, and fill it with perverſe diſputers endued with more cunning and ſubtilty? and that the thing encouraged thereby would be the learning of the man deſcribed by the Apoſtle, 1 Tim. vi. 3.? "If any man teach otherwiſe, and conſent not "to wholeſome words, even the words of our "Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and to the doctrine which "is according to godlineſs;" ver. 4. "he is proud, "knowing nothing, but doting about queſtions "and ſtrifes of words, whereof cometh envy, "ſtrife, railings, evil ſurmiſings," ver. 5. "perverſe diſputings of men of corrupt minds, and "deſtitute of the truth," &c.

It is true, that we do not reckon it impoſſible, but that diſcoveries of ſome truths may be made, not only new, but contrary to ſome of our preſent principles; for we do not fancy that we are infallible, and abſolutely ſecured from miſtakes: but then we can only think, that an opinion of an adverſary may poſſibly be true, while, at preſent at leaſt, it appears highly probable that it is falſe; whereas we think it in the laſt degree probable, that the contrary ſentiment is true, and only poſſible that it may be falſe; in which caſe, I think it evident, that we muſt be determined more by the probability, than by the bare poſſibility, and accordingly think that ſound Chriſtian learning will be in the likelieſt way to increaſe when that principle is adhered to.

(4.) THERE remains now only one objection againſt Confeſſions to be conſidered, namely, the diſturbances and animoſities they occaſion in the world, and the great diſadvantage they are to peace and charity. "Hi enim libri," ſays an author of that ſide, "origo et fomentum adhuc "fuerunt tot litium, altercationum, rixarum, "infectationum, contentionum, ſimultatum, a-"cerbitatum, conviciorum, condemnationum, et "nefandarum diſtractionum; quibus nunquam "carebit eccleſia dum illorum librorum et ſcrip-"torum autoritas ſtabit *."

What we have repreſented upon the laſt argument, may in a great meaſure be applied to this objection alſo; and therefore a very few obſervations upon it will be ſufficient to anſwer it. In the firſt place, it may, we believe, without preſumption, be affirmed, that any miſchiefs and diſorders which can be laid to the charge of Confeſſions have been almoſt wholly owing to the abuſe of them, and their having been built upon wrong foundations, and enforced with unjuſtifiable arguments.

It was when creeds claimed an abſolute ſubmiſſion, and implicit faith; when they were edged with the ſword, and carried along with them blood and torture, that they became very dangerous tools, and fatal to the peace of mankind. Conſult the hiſtory of the church in all ages, and it will be found, that perſecution, and an invaſion upon the rights of others, a humour of impoſing the faith of the prevailing party upon the minority, and enforcing this invaſion on the conſciences of Chriſtians, by fines, impriſonments, and death itſelf, were the ſprings of all the evils complained of.

* *Vide* De pace eccleſiæ reſtituenda conſilium, apud Clericum; Bibl. choiſie, tom. 7. p. 402.

But does this in the leaſt affect that authority of Confeſſions, which, as we have proved, is perfectly conſiſtent with all the moſt extended rights of a rational creature, and takes its riſe from the unalienable and fundamental privileges of all ſocieties? Is it an objection againſt creeds which are recommended by none but equitable and rational arguments, and are not urged upon others againſt their conſciences, nor are attended by the dreadful train of deaths and tortures, which contain the ſting and poiſon of the Papal decrees, and, if they be taken away, afford an eaſy acceſs to reap the ſweets and advantages of Confeſſions, without the alledged hazards?

Theſe uncharitable heats, bitter invectives, and calumnious miſrepreſentations of perſons and things, which are too oft to be found amongſt contending parties, with all the other melancholy fruits of diviſion which diſquiet mankind, and diſturb their peace and happineſs, are not owing to a vigorous zeal for thoſe doctrines which appear to be according to truth and godlineſs, nor to a high eſteem and ſteady adherence to our principles concerning creeds; but they are to be entirely attributed to the unſanctified paſſions of mankind, and thoſe affections and inclinations which have not been purified by the grace of God, nor brought under the obedience of the goſpel, our pride and vanity, and worldly-mindedneſs, fondneſs of applauſe, eſteem of our own ſchemes and performances, and all the other branches of ſelf-love.

It is theſe that raiſe all the ſtorms which toſs about mankind, and have broken the harmony of ſocieties, and the peace of families; theſe have blown up the coals of contention, and fed the flames which have ſo long devoured the world. Theſe corrupt unbroken hearts of ours make us

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ſo impatient of contradiction, ſo ſenſibly touched with the leaſt oppoſition to our opinions, which we vainly fancy every body ſhould be as fond of as ourſelves, and ſo eagerly bent upon methods of revenging the ſuppoſed injury done our judgement. Hence men become ſo fierce and imperious, ſo little tender of their fellow-creatures that may differ from them, and ſo violent in all their meaſures, abandoned to anger, reſentments, hatreds; and hence we are ſo ready to paſs a raſh and cenſorious judgement concerning the motives and ends of thoſe who think otherwiſe than we do, to excommunicate, and, it may be, damn them, and, while they live, to treat them as our enemies. *Whence*, ſays the Apoſtle, *come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your luſts that war in your members* *?

If theſe paſſions were mortified, and men would ſubdue their own ſpirits; if we would form the temper of our ſouls upon the model of Chriſtianity, and practiſe thoſe noble virtues which are the diſtinguiſhing ornaments of our religion; all thoſe miſchiefs would ſoon have an end, and we would then ſee what had been the true cauſe of all our diſorders. Make a man humble and modeſt, convince him of the weakneſs of mankind, and the narrowneſs of human underſtanding, purify him from pride, and vain-glory, and ſelf-love, and engage him to imitate the meekneſs and lowlineſs of the bleſſed Jeſus, and then all his life and actions will breathe peace, and love, and charity, and he will make the world and the church happy.

But if this be not done, it is in vain to fancy that this or the other ſcheme of principles will

* James iv. 1.

procure quiet and harmony to ſocieties. It is unacquaintedneſs with human nature, and the true ſprings of our misfortunes, which makes people imagine that the running down Confeſſions of Faith, and the expoſing all compoſures of this nature to contempt, will ever do the buſineſs. Thoſe paſſions would loſe none of their fury, and would prove as outrageous, in the breaſts of thoſe that were for no reſtraints of this kind, as in thoſe of any other. We ſhould ſee, and we actually have ſeen, a vain and proud free-thinker as fond of his own notions, as imperious, and as uncharitable, as the moſt zealous promoter of orthodoxy; his paſſions as ready to boil over, and inflame ſocieties to their utter diſtraction, and the ruin of their peace. Theſe corruptions, ſeated in the heart, will always find ſome vent to break out at; and if they do not exert themſelves about religious matters, they will do it in a way equally diſadvantageous to the world.

There can be therefore no colour of reaſon in this objection, except it could be proved, that the principles which we have endeavoured to vindicate with reſpect to Confeſſions are inconſiſtent with the graces of the Chriſtian life, which are beautified with ſo incomparable charms, and would render the world ſo happy, did they prevail in it.

But what pretence is there for ſuch an allegation? May not moderation and meekneſs in the management of a cauſe be reconciled with the moſt unſhaken ſteadineſs? And are not the warmeſt zeal for the faith of the goſpel, and the moſt vigorous efforts in contending for it, conſiſtent with a love to the ſouls of men, a moſt compaſſionate concern for their errors and backſlidings, and ſincere endeavours to reclaim them, managed with all the winning arts of modeſty, humility, and diffidence of one's ſelf, and a deference

ference for our neighbour? May I not manifeſt all the beauties of the perfecteſt charity and good-will, and all the charms of patience, ſelf-denial, candour, and ingenuity, with reſpect to a man whom I cannot make choice of for my miniſter, or perhaps admit into Chriſtian communion, till he give ſome reaſonable aſſurance that he is a diſciple of Jeſus, and hath embraced the faith once delivered to the ſaints? ſince I may exerciſe all theſe graces towards perſons, concerning whom, I am perſuaded, that they never were Chriſtians, or that they have departed from the truth, and ought to ſhow all gentleneſs to all men, Heathens and publicans, if we may thereby reclaim them, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth.

Theſe are the principal objections which, we conceive, can be brought againſt Confeſſions, as they are embraced and made uſe of by all the Reformed churches, and particularly the church of Scotland; and we flatter ourſelves, that ſo full and plain anſwers have been made to them, that it will be eaſy for the reader, by the help of them, to diſcover the weakneſs of any other cavils of the ſame nature, which are ſo vainly boaſted of by adverſaries.

HAVING thus finiſhed what relates to the arguments againſt creeds, and vindicated their equity, uſefulneſs, and neceſſity, it remains only, that, in a few words, we repreſent ſome things which impreſs us with the moſt hearty concern in this affair, make us look upon the queſtion as a matter of great importance, and animate us with a warm zeal and activity in eſpouſing what appears to us the better ſide.

The near connection which the queſtion concerning Confeſſions hath with the doctrines of revelation, and the great influence they have upon

them; their appearing one very proper, if not abſolutely neceſſary mean to preſerve theſe in their purity, and to manifeſt our high eſteem and cordial acceptation of them; repeated experiences, that the clamour and contempt which articles of faith and creeds have of late been expoſed to, have almoſt always proceeded from a coldneſs of affection to the truths of the goſpel, and an indifferency as to matters of faith; and the viſible tendency which they have to leſſen that ſteady concern and great value for the doctrines of Chriſtianity which ſhould poſſeſs the breaſt of every one who pretends to be a follower of Jeſus, and to reduce us to the degenerate and hateful temper of Laodicea, join together in touching us after a moſt ſenſible manner, when we reflect on this ſubject, and naturally intermix the regard for the truth itſelf, with our eſteem for Confeſſions, ſo neceſſary to ſecure it.

And is religion reduced to ſo low an ebb, and the impreſſions of the great God and our bleſſed Saviour ſo far razed out of the minds of mankind, that they can, with an eaſineſs of thought, behold a flood of errors breaking down all the boundaries of truth, the moſt ſacred myſteries of godlineſs impudently denied and impugned, and the diſtinguiſhing doctrines of Chriſtianity, whereby it is exalted above the darkneſs of Paganiſm and the follies of Mahomet, treacherouſly undermined, ſubtilized into an airy phantom, or at leaſt doubted, if not diſclaimed? All which muſt be borne with as little differences in opinion, that ought not to diminiſh our eſteem and affection to the maintainers of them, ſhould not interrupt Chriſtian communion, or even unfit a man for being our miniſter; at leaſt we need not uſe the ſmalleſt caution in inquiries about his faith, or purſue the neceſſary means to diſcover it, and obtain

tain ſatisfaction, that he is not of the number of the groſſeſt heretics.

We cannot but look upon ſuch a falſe moderation and charity, and a pretended love of liberty, as a baſe forgetfulneſs of our duty, and the obligations we are under to our Saviour, a real betraying his honour into the hands of infidels, and inglorioufly deſerting or looking with a ſtupid unconcernedneſs upon thoſe intereſts which ſhould be dearer to us than our lives, and have a conſtant preference to our chiefeſt joys.

Where is our religion, if the doctrines of it be corrupted? Are not theſe the deſign and ſubſtance of relevation which God bleſſed the world with, that he might enlighten their underſtandings, and purify them by that faith, diſcover the myſteries hid from ages and generations, and ſcatter the clouds which hang over the world? Are not grace and truth repreſented to us as the glory of the Word that was made fleſh, and dwelt among us, and the deſign of his tabernacling with men *? Theſe doctrines are the great means of working a reformation in the ſouls of men, and improving them in holineſs: *Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. And for their ſakes I ſanctify myſelf, that they alſo might be ſanctified through the truth* †. One of the noble advantages to be expected from that glory and happineſs of the goſpel-ſtate, the miſſion of the Holy Spirit, was, that he will guide us into all truth ‡. This is what the great apoſtle of the Gentiles wiſhes ſo earneſtly in behalf of the Coloſſians, that they might attain unto *all the riches of the full aſſurance of underſtanding, in the knowledge of the myſtery of God, even of the Father, and of Chriſt* ‖. How pa-

* John i. 14. † John xvii. 17. 19. ‡ John xvi. 13. ‖ Col. ii. 2.

thetically

thetically are we exhorted, to *hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that hath promiſed* *, to *hold the myſtery of faith in a pure conſcience* †, and to *continue grounded and ſettled in the faith, and unmoved from the hope of the goſpel, which we have heard* ‡? And is not, through the whole ſcriptures, a departure from the faith repreſented as an apoſtaſy from Chriſtianity, and deſtructive of the ſouls of men? Upon them that receive not the love of the truth, *God will ſend ſtrong deluſions, that they ſhould believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth* ‖. And what can be more plain and explicit than the words of the Apoſtle? *Whoſoever tranſgreſſeth, and abideth not in the DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, HATH NOT GOD: he that abideth in the DOCTRINE of Chriſt, he hath both the FATHER AND THE SON* **. It were eaſy to add innumerable more places to the ſame purpoſe.

With what horror, then, amazement, and grief of ſoul, muſt we look upon the apoſtaſy of theſe latter times, and the fatal ſucceſs with which the old ſerpent beguiles fooliſh men, and ſpreads his helliſh conqueſts over their minds, to the deſtruction of truth and godlineſs? Can we remember that we are Chriſtians, and behold with unconcernedneſs the miſts and darkneſs of theſe infernal regions overclouding the light of the goſpel, and drawing a ſhadow over the divine amiableneſs and beauty of truth? ſo many mad men, who love to breathe this impure air, and ſuck in with greedineſs theſe loathſome poiſonous vapours of error and blindneſs?

Muſt it not fetch up a groan from our hearts

* Heb. x. 23. † 1 Tim iii. 9. ‡ Col. i. 23.
‖ 2 Theſſ. ii. 11. 12. ** 2 John verſ. 9.

ſwelled

ſwelled with ſorrow, and draw down tears from our eyes, that proud vain men ſhould dare to profane the ſacredeſt myſteries, and inſolently viliſy the eternal truths to which the Son of God bare witneſs? that monſtrous hereſies ſhould be entertained by poor impious creatures, who have no pity upon their own ſouls, but willingly fall into the ſnare of the devil, and offer ſo pleaſing a ſacrifice as a cheated murdered ſoul is to his helliſh malice? and that others who profeſs the truth ſhould behave with an inglorious neutrality, as if they were no wiſe concerned in the matter, and the honour of a Redeemer, and his goſpel, might without a ſtruggle be abandoned? and, with an equal perfidiouſneſs as if they openly deſerted the Captain of ſalvation, the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge laid up in him are undervalued, as mere ſpeculations, and diſputable queſtions, concerning intricate, if not unintelligible points?

Is this the treatment we give to that excellent revelation, and the return made to the kindneſs of our friend? Is this all the influence which the love of God, and the compaſſions of a Saviour, have on us? the expiring ſighs and groans, and the dying blood, of him who ſuffered that he might *give a teſtimony to the truth*, and *bring us from darkneſs unto light?* Do we give ſo cold an acceptation, and lend ſo inſenſible an ear, to the joyful ſound, which hath come down from heaven, and carries alongſt with it divine pleaſures and bleſſings to a people that know it, and are directed thereby to walk in the light of God's countenance, and to rejoice in his name all the day *? Is this the entertainment we give to the moſt important truths, flowing from the mouth

* Pſal. lxxxix. 15. 16.

of

of the greateſt prophet, endeared to us by the moſt moving and affectionate arguments, and ſupported by the ſtrongeſt evidence? Truths that are beautified by the luſtre of an eternal excellency, and ſurrounded with the characters of ineffable wiſdom and knowledge, that faith of the goſpel, and thoſe myſteries of man's redemption, which are the reſult of divine counſels, and the glory of an infinite underſtanding, are gazed at with wonder and delight, and looked into with the curious eye of the moſt exalted angel, which furniſh matter for the eternal contemplation of heaven, and the loud unwearied ſongs of numberleſs crouds of adoring admiring ſeraphs.

Are the goſpel of Chriſt, and the truth he bore witneſs to, received with ſo much eſteem, affection, and wonder, in heaven; and yet deſpiſed, corrupted, or undervalued, upon earth, by men for whoſe ſalvation this goſpel is deſigned, to whom it diſcovers life and immortality, and opens ſuch an amazing ſcene of triumphing love, and victorious grace, and of all the mighty things that heaven and hell mean? as if there were a ſmall difference betwixt this admirable and harmonious contrivance, that divine ſyſtem of the brighteſt, and wiſeſt, and moſt momentous doctrines, and the confuſed heap of deformed errors, and monſtrous hereſies; and as if it were but a matter of trifling ſpeculation, whether the purity and light of heaven, or the clouds and the ſmoke of the ſulphurous and fiery lake, poſſeſs the hearts of men, and whether the kingdom of darkneſs, or that of the Son of God, prevail in the world.

But, ah! an increaſed horror ſeizes upon our ſpirits, and aſtoniſhment is added to our thought, that ſuch hideous and loathſome productions of hell ſhould take root in theſe parts of the world, which God hath bleſſed with the nobleſt diſcoveries

veries of the goſpel, and the cleareſt and moſt certain knowledge of the kingdom of his dear Son, and hath wrought ſo amazing things to deliver them from the ignorance of Paganiſm, and the tyrannical blindneſs of Popery; and yet that any of us, ungrateful to God our Saviour, and ſtupid to our plaineſt intereſts, ſhould be ſo laboriouſly employed to form a covering of thick darkneſs and error, whereby we may hinder thoſe rays of eternal light which are diffuſed in ſuch plenty, and darted down ſo ſtrong and direct by that glorious Sun, from touching our eyes, and irradiating our ſouls.

When ſo diſmal a ſtate of things preſents itſelf to our view, can thoſe who retain any love for their Saviour, and value for divine revelation, without bluſhing, neglect any opportunity whereby they may profeſs their adherence to the ſacred truths of the goſpel, and declare to all the world, as loudly as they can, their inviolable eſteem and veneration for theſe adorable myſteries? may manifeſt the warmeſt zeal for their honour, and act with an undaunted courage in their defence; and may ſhow with how vigorous an affection that pure light is received into their ſouls; and that a regard for the glory of their Redeemer, and the doctrines of his grace, is ſtronger than their other paſſions, and ſuperior to the moſt dazzling charms of this world, and the moſt alluring temptations of life. Then eſpecially they ſhould "hold "faſt the profeſſion of their faith without waver-"ing, for he is faithful that hath promiſed *;" and "profeſs a good profeſſion before many wit-"neſſes †;" and then "they ſhould ſeparate be-"twixt the clean and the unclean ‡," flee away

* Heb. x. 23.
† 1 Tim. vi. 12.
‡ 2 Cor. vi. 17.

from

from the tabernacles of the ungodly and perverſe men, and "have no fellowſhip with the unfruitful "works of darkneſs."

Every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the great Prophet of the church, or the inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt, merits our belief and regard; but no doubt our eſteem and zeal ſhould riſe in proportion to the nature and importance of the doctrines. When the great foundations of Chriſtianity are undermined; when the perſon, offices, and work of the Meſſiah, are robbed of their glory, openly denied, and treated with ſcorn, or debaſed as indifferent and inconſiderable; when the return made to the author of the great ſalvation is the impugning of his divinity, and, becauſe he took on him the form of a ſervant, the ſacrilegious detracting from his equality with God; and "when falſe teachers do privily bring in damn-"able hereſies, even denying the Lord that bought "them;" then our zeal ſhould be invigorated, and flow out with a higher tide of affection; then we ſhould be *valiant for the truth*, and ſtand up for the glory of our maſter againſt open enemies and traitorous renegadoes; we ſhould then make the plaineſt declarations of our own faith, account it inglorious to languiſh and give back in ſuch a cauſe, to ſculk behind the covert of ambiguous words, and, as if we were mediators betwixt God and his inſolent adverſaries, with a deteſtable lukewarmneſs to ſet up for reconciling ſchemes, whereby a confederacy may be entered into betwixt light and darkneſs, God and Belial. No; let us then with the openeſt candour declare ourſelves on the Lord's ſide, and "ſtand faſt in one ſpirit, with one mind, "ſtriving together for the faith of the goſpel; in "nothing terrified by our adverſaries *." Then is

* Phil. i. 27. 28.

the proper time to be influenced by what our Saviour tells us, "Whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of "me, and of my words, of him ſhall the Son of "man be aſhamed, when he ſhall come in his own "glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy an-"gels *" "Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before "men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father "which is in heaven †"

And how momentous arguments have we to ſtir us up to all this, and to put life and conſtancy in our endeavours! All the mighty powers of eternal loving kindneſs, that love of God which ſent his Son into the world to ſave us, and enlighten our ſouls with theſe heavenly doctrines, all the wonders of mercy, and the triumphs of a dying Redeemer's grace, with an united force, flow into our hearts, and conſpire to warm our affections, and animate our paſſions with a heavenly flame in the cauſe of our Saviour. The native beauty and ſimplicity of the goſpel-truths, ſurrounded with all the glories of our Saviour's death and love, attended with the higheſt powers of duty, and gratitude, and generoſity, and teſtified to by the loudeſt applauſes of heavenly hoſts, can never miſs to furniſh an endleſs train, and an irreſiſtible force of motives. Can there be a breaſt in which they will fail to make an impreſſion?

Behold! yonder our exalted Lord looking down from his throne, to encourage and enliven us: he is expecting what we will do for his honour, and how our bowels are moved within us: he points out his blood and wounds which ſaved us from everlaſting death; the croſs which he endured, and the ſhame he deſpiſed, to make us happy; the ſcorn of the multitude, the rage and

* Luke ix. 26. † Matth. x. 32.

hatred of the learned, the madneſs and blindneſs of the rulers of this world, yea, the helliſh efforts and hiſſings of the infernal hoſts, which could never ſhake his reſolution, and make him deſert our cauſe. He repreſents to our view the light and joy of a reconciled God, and the eternal pleaſures of the ſanctuary of immortality, all the fruits of his purchaſe; and he makes bare his glorious arm, that arm which pulled us out of hell, and drave back the devouring flames; and he looks to ſee, after ſuch an amazing and delightful proſpect, what return we will make to him; if it be poſſible for us to look on, and ſee him robbed of his glory and majeſty, his Deity vilified, and his truths and cauſe given up and betrayed. And were there any uſe for terrors in ſo affectionate an argument, he preſents the fearful end of apoſtates and deſerters from the armies of Iſrael, while at the ſame time he allures us with as great encouragements to fidelity: "It is a faithful ſaying. For "if we be dead with him, we ſhall alſo live with "him: if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him: "if we deny him, he will alſo deny us: if we be- "lieve not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot de- "ny himſelf *."

Let theſe things arm us with an invincible reſolution, and inſpire us with a generous warmth for the glory and intereſts of our bleſſed maſter; and let us never count any thing too dear whereby we may honour him in a declining age, and in the midſt of a perverſe world; and let the paſſions of a holy indignation and zeal exert themſelves, with a growing vigour and affection; let us never be frightened or enticed away from him, or beguiled with fair pretences of cunning deceivers; but, with an equal fortitude and ſincerity, let us

* 2 Tim. ii. 11. 12. 13.

ſhow

ſhow a juſt diſdain for that laughter and wit which profane the myſteries of religion, a contempt for that learning, and thoſe accompliſhments, which are made engines to overturn our Saviour's throne, and for the arrogance and ſelf ſufficiency of proud imperious heretics. Let us never be ſhaken by the authority of great names, or a regard to our friends and our party, or by the undervaluing thoughts and the frowns of the rich and the great, nor be cooled by their indifferency in that cauſe. Let us ſhow, that the ſide of our God and Saviour is the party to which we will ſacrifice all other intereſts and perſons; that, however learned and knowing ſome men may be, however much we formerly reſpected and loved them, whatever obligations we thought ourſelves under to their uſeful labours in matters (though of juſt concern to us) of infinitely leſs moment, that all theſe can never make us forget our maſter; that his blood and death are ſtronger ties upon our ſouls, and have a higher claim to our endeavours; and that whenever they come in competition with his dignity and glory, we will make no ſcruple to expoſe to public contempt the reputation and learning of ſuch men; yea, though they were angels from heaven, to reckon them accurſed *.

And let us never be ſeized by cowardice and ſloth, though recommended by the names of *charity*, and *peace*, and *liberty*, and *prudence*: but may we abhor that pretended charity which cannot ſubſiſt without the ruins of the nobleſt part of true charity, a fervent love to God; and let us never think our eaſe, and eſteem, and party, and politics, and life itſelf, when compounded into one, too coſtly a ſacrifice for the Deity of Chriſt,

* Gal. i. 8.

and the defence of the truth, but offer it with chearfulneſs and joy.

But we muſt always be careful to govern our zeal for the truth by the laws of the goſpel, and to animate our oppoſition to heretics by the meek and lowly ſpirit of Jeſus Chriſt; and this will manifeſt the purity of our affections, and that it is a diſintereſted love to our Saviour, and value for the knowledge of the Son of God, and not pride and vanity, nor an impoſing uncharitable temper, which move us.

Let us therefore, by our whole conduct, even to backſliders and to infidels, ſhow how paſſionately we love their ſouls; with what a tender compaſſion their wilful errors, and hardened obſtinacy, affect us; with what pleaſure we would contribute to their recovery, and to their true happineſs; and with what open arms we would joyfully receive them, did they return to the faith of the goſpel.

By theſe methods we ſhall ſhow ourſelves valiant ſoldiers of Chriſt, and worthy of the name we bear; and in this way we ſhall give acceptable obedience to the important injunctions of our religion, "to contend earneſtly for the faith once "delivered to the ſaints*;" "to hold faſt the "form of ſound words which we have heard, in "faith and love which is in Chriſt Jeſus†;" and yet being moved with *a zeal according to knowledge*, to be 'gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, "in meekneſs inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves; if God peradventure will give them re"pentance to the acknowledging of the truth‡."

We may meet with diſcouragements in a world where darkneſs and error ſo much prevail; we may be expoſed to the hatred, diſeſteem, and de-

* Jude, verſ. 3. † 2 Tim. i. 13.
‡ 2 Tim. ii. 24. 25.

riſion,

riſion, of vain ſcornful men; and it cannot miſs to fill our hearts with grief, and embitter our lives, when we ſee the moſt precious truths vilified and trampled on by the enemies to the croſs of Chriſt, and hereſy ſpreading its contagion. This will make us ſigh out, "Wo's us that we ſhould "inhabit the lands of Meſech, and dwell in the "tents of Kedar *." But let us think upon the maſter whom we own, and the excellency of the cauſe which we eſpouſe; let us raiſe up our longing eyes to the dawn of the everlaſting day, and to thoſe native regions of light and purity, where truth ever appears in its eternal charms, and the myſteries of ſalvation are admired and gazed at with the moſt affectionate wonder, which is animated by the divine beauty and excellency; where the lovelineſs, and harmony, and importance of them, are never diſputed, and they are ſet in too bright a light for any inhabitant to fancy, that they are intricacies of ſpeculation, and not far different from the oppoſite errors: and let us raiſe our enlarged thoughts to the expectation of that mighty day when our earneſt contention for the truth will meet with the loud applauſes of myriads of angels, while eternal ſhame and hiſſings will accompany the ignorant deſpiſers of the faith of the goſpel.

It may perhaps be thought, that on this head the perſon and the manner of the writer have been often changed, and that the accuracy of method is neglected; but a ſincere concern for the ſouls of men, and a grief of heart for the unhappy ſtate of religion among us, could not eaſily keep to artificial rules in venting themſelves.

We are indeed confidently told, that it is no great matter what a man believes, if ſo be he is

* Pſal. cxx. 5.

endued with ſincerity, and hath a holy practice. "I never yet could ſee (ſays an often-quoted au-"thor) a liſt of fundamentals in Chriſtianity. "——That only, in my notion, is a fundamen-"tal miſtake in religion, which is inconſiſtent "with a good heart, and a religious converſa-"tion *." We hope we ſhall always put the higheſt value upon a holy life; but to ſuppoſe there is nothing of importance in religion, beſides that ſobriety and goodneſs which at leaſt other men can judge of, and that the doctrines of the goſpel may in that caſe be diſbelieved without great hazard, is to overturn the whole ſcheme of Chriſtianity. For what? hath not that morality been found amongſt the Heathens? and before the coming of our Saviour, the moral law, which governed practice, was promulgated by God himſelf; and therefore the doctrines of religion are the diſtinguiſhing glories of Chriſtianity, and its excellency above the Moſaic œconomy: "For the law was given by "Moſes, but grace and truth came by Jeſus Chriſt. "No man hath ſeen God at any time; the only "begotten Son, which is in the boſom of the Fa-"ther, he hath declared him †."

Beſides, theſe truths which are the objects of our faith are not myſteries of ſpeculation, but deſigned to promote holineſs in the lives, and to purify the hearts of Chriſtians; they are *a doctrine according to godlineſs*; and as the apoſtle ſpeaks to the Coloſſians, "The word of the truth of the "goſpel, which is come unto them, as it is in all "the world, bringeth forth fruit; as it did alſo in "them ſince the day they heard of it, and knew "the grace of God in truth ‡." Theſe great articles of our faith, concerning the ſatisfaction and

* Occaſional Paper, vol. 2. N° 1. p. 24.
† John i. 17. 18. ‡ Col. i. 6.

righteouſneſs

righteouſneſs of the Meſſiah, the imperfection and inſufficiency of all our performances, and the grace and love of our Redeemer, are all calculated to add force to the law, and both exalt and invigorate our obedience.

Our obedience is a rational one; all the parts of a holy life muſt, as well as zeal, be *according to knowledge;* and therefore it is in vain to pretend to real purity of heart or life, without a belief of the truth. But in ſo far as error clouds the underſtanding, a corruption of manners will ſully the converſation; eſpecially with reſpect to the nobleſt part of religion, thoſe acts of it which have a regard to God. How is it poſſible that the man can be really good, who is conſtantly offering the higheſt affronts to his maker, and, by a diſbelief of the plain and important articles of faith, is loudly proclaiming him a liar? "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witneſs in "himſelf: he that believeth not God, hath made "him a LIAR, becauſe he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son *." Nor can we ſeparate what God hath joined as the neceſſary means of our eternal happineſs: "Becauſe God," ſaith the apoſtle to the Theſſalonians, "hath "from the beginning choſen you to ſalvation, "through SANCTIFICATION OF THE "SPIRIT, AND BELIEF OF THE "TRUTH†."

When, therefore, we reflect on the foregoing and innumerable other conſiderations to endear the truths of God to our ſouls, and awaken our zeal for them, how can we poſſibly look on thoſe as our brethren in the Lord, who have denied him? or receive ſuch as are ſuſpected of hereſies, and decline to give *a reaſon of the hope that is in them*, into the communion of the church,

* 1 John v. 10. † 2 Theſſ. ii. 13.

when,

when, beſides the nature of the thing, and the purity which God requires in all the ſocieties of his people, we could never reconcile ſuch a practice with an honour for truth, and the expreſs declarations of the goſpel? "For what fellow-"ſhip hath righteouſneſs with unrighteouſneſs? "what communion hath light with darkneſs? "and what concord hath Chriſt with Belial? or "what part hath he that believeth with an infi-"del? and what agreement hath the temple of "God with idols? For ye are the temple of the "living God: wherefore come out from among "them, and be ye ſeparate, ſaith the Lord, and "touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive "you *."

And how much leſs can we ſubmit to a man as our miniſter, who hath erred in any important point, and refuſes to give a clear and full declaration of his orthodoxy? for which purpoſe we have proved, that Creeds and Confeſſions are abſolutely neceſſary. What a grief and diſturbance of ſoul muſt poſſeſs us, and with what horror muſt we be ſeized, if we ſhould have no aſſurance, but that in going to the temple of God, inſtead of the light of heaven, we ſhould have the clouds and miſts of error overſhadowing us from the pulpit? that our attendance upon ordinances diſpenſed by him, inſtead of promoting our ſalvation through the *belief of the truth*, would tend to quite contrary purpoſes? and that by ſuch a conduct we were willingly expoſing ourſelves to the ſnare of the devil, and ſubmitting to ſuch paſtors, to whom perhaps might be applied the apoſtolical injunction, "He that abideth in the "doctrine of Chriſt, he hath both the Father "and the Son. If there come any unto you, "and bring not this doctrine, receive him not in-

* 2 Cor. vi. 14. —— 17.

"to

" to your houſe, neither bid him God ſpeed :
" For he that biddeth him God ſpeed, is parta-
" ker of his evil deeds * ?" To prevent all which evils, we think Confeſſions highly uſeful, and upon that account retain a value for ſuch compoſures.

Beſides, it is repreſented to us in the ſcriptures, as one immediate deſign of the inſtitution of the ſacred office, that thereby the unity of faith, and fellowſhip of the ſaints in the belief of the ſame principles of the common ſalvation, might be gradually advanced, and at length perfected : " And
" he gave ſome, apoſtles ; and ſome, prophets ;
" and ſome, evangeliſts ; and ſome, paſtors and
" teachers ; for the PERFECTING THE
" SAINTS, for the work of the miniſtry, for
" the edifying of the body of Chriſt : till we all
" come in the UNITY OF THE FAITH, and
" of the KNOWLEDGE of the Son of God,
" unto a perfect man, unto the meaſure of the
" ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt †." How can this end be gained in a church, by miniſters who do not themſelves maintain the *unity of the faith*, but patroniſe diverſities of opinions, even in matters of importance ? and how can we be anſwerable to God, and our conſciences, if due care be not taken of this matter, nor the proper means uſed, that in ſuch points the paſtors of the church all ſpeak the ſame things ? And I hope it is a received maxim, That *they ought to ſpeak becauſe they believe ;* and eſpecially that what is immediately ſubjoined by the apoſtle be obſerved,
" That henceforth we be no more children, toſſ-
" ed to and fro, and carried about with every
" wind of doctrine, by the ſlight of men, and cun-

* 2 John 9. 10. 11. † Eph. iv. 11. 12. 13.

" ning

" ning craftineſs, whereby they lie in wait to de-
" ceive *."

It cannot alſo but animate our zeal and eſteem for Confeſſions, when we conſider the unhappy effects of deſpiſing and abandoning them, and the perſons who are their moſt furious adverſaries; that a neglect and contempt of them hath been too much accompanied by a diſeſteem of the doctrines of ſalvation, and a cold indifference as to the concerns of truth; and that, having thus frozen the ſpirits of mankind, and ſhaken looſe their faith, they have laid them open to the impreſſions of error, and hereſy makes an eaſy conqueſt of them.

It ſeems evident from experience, that none can raiſe a more noiſy clamour againſt Confeſſions, and load them with greater calumnies, than the declared enemies of all revealed religion, and the inſolent deſpiſers of our Saviour and his goſpel. They are highly gratified by all the affronts that are poured upon creeds; and with pleaſure behold a pretended liberty, and right of private judgement, the perfection and perſpicuity of the ſcriptures, and the Proteſtant principles, perverted, and artfully made uſe of to break down all the boundaries of truth, and bulwarks againſt error. This raiſes our eſteem of theſe compoſures; and gives us ground to ſuſpect, that there muſt be ſomething very good in them, and that they are very uſeful to the cauſe of Chriſtianity, when we ſee Deiſts ſo angry with them, and infidels rejoice at the proſpect of their being diſpoſſeſſed of their authority.

When they ſee perſons of ſuch a complexion ſo extremely zealous in this diſpute, would to God that our brethren, who, we hope, retain a ſincere

* Eph. iv. 14.

value

value for the truth, and a cordial eſteem and love of our Redeemer, and the precious doctrines wherewith he hath enlightened the world, would ſeriouſly conſider whoſe cauſe they are ſerving by that violent oppoſition which hath of late been ſo unreaſonably made to the authority, that creeds have in all ages, and amongſt all ſorts of Chriſtians, obtained in the church; and if it will be a ſpring of laſting joy to them, ſhould our ſcheme be baffled, and theirs prevail in the world, when their victories would only furniſh matter for triumphs to the whole tribe of infidels, and any beginnings of them are huzza'd with ſo loud acclamations by none ſo much as by the obſtinate rebels againſt their heavenly King and Lord.

Liberty, charity, moderation, &c. are very fine things, and great names; but as to the preſent application of them, and when they come from the mouths and pens of ſuch perſons, may we not prudently ſuſpect, that they are indeed levelled at the ruin of our religion, and only gild over a deadly poiſon? And, to prevent the unhappy fate of Troy, ſhould we not act with reſpect to them, according to the wiſe advice of Laocoon, which the multitude ſo fooliſhly neglected?

——— *Ulla putatis*
Dona carere dolis Danaum? ſic notus Ulyſſes?
Aut hoc incluſi ligno occultantur Achivi;
Aut hæc in noſtros fabricata eſt machina muros,
Inſpectura domos, venturaque deſuper urbi;
Aut aliquis latet error: equo ne credite, Teucri.
Quicquid id eſt, timeo Danaos et dona ferentes *.

All the beauties and excellencies of truth, the ſweets and advantages of peace and union in ſo-

* Virg. Æneid. lib. 2. l. 43.

cieties,

cieties, and of a fervent love, mutual eſteem, and harmony, among Chriſtians, concur to impreſs us with very favourable notions of Confeſſions, which we think ſo well adapted to ſecure theſe bleſſings to a church; as, on the other hand, the deformity and danger of hereſy, the fatal effects of a flood of errors breaking into a church, the grievous plague of animoſities, diviſions, and diſputes, among the members and miniſters of it, every one of them, with uncharitableneſs, heat, and obſtinacy, propagating contradictory opinions, and the melancholy influence ſuch queſtions and ſpeculations have on practical godlineſs, and the moſt amiable graces of the Chriſtian life, make us look with ſorrow and regret upon thoſe ſchemes whereby all reſtraints of order and government are deſtroyed, and a wide breach made for all theſe evils and calamities to enter, and both pollute the church and lay it waſte.

In the laſt place, we cannot miſs to take notice, that a great force is added to all theſe conſiderations, from our own experience, and the ſenſible proofs we in the church have enjoyed of the excellent advantages flowing from a well-regulated and duly-limited authority of Confeſſions; that by the means thereof, through the bleſſing of God, an uncommon harmony, in what we are perſuaded is the doctrine of God our Saviour, flouriſhes amongſt us; that religion hath been preſerved in its purity, and a ſecurity from errors and hereſies, which greatly diſtract other churches, in ſo great a meaſure obtained among us; together with a freedom from all the melancholy effects of diſputes and diviſions amongſt miniſters, as to the eſtabliſhed articles of faith, which give ſo great diſturbance to the minds of the poor people, and put an unhappy ſtop to their edification and growth in grace and holineſs. Of which

evils, if there be any ſeeds amongſt us big with growing miſchief, they are perhaps owing wholely to the want of a juſt improvement of our Confeſſion, and a vigorous maintenance of its authority: and it is with pleaſure we obſerve, that we have no ground to ſuſpect our eccleſiaſtical officers of hypocriſy; and that they do not ſincerely believe thoſe articles which they ſubſcribe; and that all theſe valuable advantages to truth and holineſs are gained, without any invaſion upon the liberty of Chriſtians, and the right of private judgement, or any aſſiſtance of violence and perſecution, or the other weapons of a carnal warefare.

3. HAVING now finiſhed what we thought neceſſary for the defence and illuſtration of Confeſſions, there remains very little to be ſaid concerning our own in particular. It does not in the leaſt belong to this performance, to vindicate the truth of the doctrines aſſerted in them. Whether we or our adverſaries have judged righteſt, muſt depend upon the holy ſcriptures; to the determination whereof we with confidence and ſubmiſſion entirely refer our cauſe: only, ſince our church hath embraced the Weſtminſter Confeſſion as the uncorrupted faith of the goſpel, and that every ſociety muſt act according to the light of their own conſciences, all that hath been ſaid may be immediately applied to the vindication of the authority which that Confeſſion obtains amongſt us, as a public ſtandard of orthodoxy, to be ſubſcribed by all our ſpiritual paſtors and rulers.

Some may poſſibly be diſguſted at the length of our Confeſſion, and that in the number of articles it ſhould ſo far exceed the primitive creeds; as indeed all the Reformed Confeſſions do. But this muſt be attributed to the great change of perſons

ſons and circumſtances; to the vaſt multitude and variety of errors which prevail in the world at this time, and ought to be guarded againſt; and to the ſubtile diſtinctions and artful ſubterfuges of heretics, under which they conceal their heterodox ſentiments, and impoſe upon the unſkilful by fair pretences, and thereby lay a neceſſity upon the church to expreſs their belief of the contrary truths in very full and conſpicuous terms; and we are ſo far from thinking this plainneſs and determineteneſs of expreſſion a defect, that we cannot but believe it a very great excellency of a compoſure, the very deſign whereof is to obtain a well-grounded information of the ſubſcriber's real principles.

It may be alſo thought by ſome, that our Confeſſion confines the office of the miniſtry within too narrow limits; that the articles of it are too particular, and deſcend to queſtions of no great moment; and that a man may be very well qualified for the ſacred function, and endued with great abilities, which might enable him to be very uſeful and ſerviceable to the intereſts of religion and truth, and yet have a ſcruple as to ſome of the leſſer points ſo poſitively determined.

We ſhall not deny but that poſſibly it may be ſo; we do not pretend that our Confeſſion is carried to a pitch of unblemiſhed perfection; and that it might not have been amended and adjuſted with greater wiſdom and accuracy, to all the deſigns of ſuch compoſures. And we ſhall own, that there might be good men, and very uſeful miniſters, whoſe labours the church cannot enjoy, becauſe they are not able to come up to the terms of our Confeſſion, and may doubt or diſbelieve ſome of its articles. But the Weſtminſter aſſembly which framed, and our church which eſtabliſhed it, did, what all wiſe men muſt do, act according

according to the beſt of their judgement, and followed that way which they thought liable to feweſt hazards.

And we are juſtly perſuaded, that there is no ſuch danger upon the one hand to religion, tho' a man that might prove a valuable miniſter (who in ſome leſſer points thinks differently from our Confeſſion) ſhould be diverted from the ſacred function, and apply himſelf to ſerve God and his generation in any other lawful and uſeful employment of life; while in the mean time the church may be ſupplied with another man, of equal abilities in all other reſpects, and of approved orthodoxy as to thoſe things in which the other eſpouſes the wrong ſide; as there is, upon the other hand, ſhould a truth be neglected that ought to have made a part of the Confeſſion, and a door opened to let in error and diviſion; eſpecially ſince this needs never occaſion ſchiſm in the church, and the erecting of altar againſt altar, theſe public articles of faith not being made a term of Chriſtian communion.

PART III.

Containing thoſe ends of Confeſſions which have a relation to all the members of the church.

WE come now to the third claſs of the ends and purpoſes of Confeſſions of Faith, namely, ſuch as regard all the members of that Chriſtian ſociety whoſe Confeſſions they are, and as they are deſigned for the uſe and advantage of the whole body of the people; and on this head, having no adverſaries to deal with, nor any diſputes

to engage in, we ſhall detain the reader but a very little time.

I. The principal deſign of Confeſſions which regards the whole Chriſtian people, is, to provide them with a ſummary of the true and holy principles of our religion, adapted to their capacities, and the circumſtances of the church; whereby they may be aſſiſted in attaining the knowledge of the neceſſary doctrines of ſalvation, and improving daily therein. Agreeably hereunto, the Duke of Wirtemberg gives this reaſon for publiſhing his Confeſſion, *Qua populus in doctrina vere pia recte imbuatur, et ad veram agnitionem Filii Dei perducatur.*

We need not inſiſt upon a thing which will be ſo univerſally acknowledged, as the equity and uſefulneſs of creeds, if we take them in this view; and that it is of very great advantage to Chriſtians, whoſe time, fortune, or abilities, may render it unfit for them to ſtudy books of greater learning and ſubtilty, to have the aſſiſtance of a well digeſted compend, where the truths of Chriſtianity, as founded upon the holy ſcriptures, are laid before them in their purity and glory, their dependence upon and connection with one another made eaſy and plain, and all the parts of the adorable myſtery of man's redemption repreſented in one view; whereby the weaker memories and judgements of the people are mightily aſſiſted, the united rays of this heavenly light, *the day-ſpring from on high* overſhadowing us, ſhine forth with the brighteſt glory, and the infinite wiſdom and excellency of divine revelation are more eaſily and fully perceived. And as ſuch works have been attempted by divers hands, ſo it was certainly fit that particular churches ſhould be careful to furniſh the people with this mean of Chriſtian knowledge, namely, ſummaries of the doctrines of religion, of general uſe

uſe to all their people, fitted to promote the unity of the faith among them, and calculated to the condition and circumſtances of ſeveral ages and countries.

The Reformed churches, by publiſhing their Confeſſions, have furniſhed the world with many excellent compoſures of this kind; but we hope we may be allowed to retain a peculiar eſteem and value for the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, as, in an uncommon degree, ſerviceable to the intereſt of religion and truth.

The fullneſs and completeneſs of this excellent ſummary of Chriſtian knowledge recommend it. All the great doctrines of our holy religion are brought within ſo eaſy a compaſs, that there is no perſon but may frequently find leiſure to peruſe them; nor do we believe, that there is any truth of importance but is there touched at: thoſe articles eſpecially which are the principal object of our faith and joy, the grace and love of God, and ſalvation through the righteouſneſs of Jeſus, are held forth in their glory and beauty, and illuſtrated in their perfect harmony among themſelves, and with the other divine excellencies; and all the parts of our Confeſſion are accommodated to the ſtate of religion, and the hereſies and errors which prevail in the world, and fitted to put us in remembrance, and eſtabliſh us in the PRESENT TRUTH, as the apoſtle expreſſes it. By this means it will much more conduce to inform the underſtandings of the people, and give them a ſufficient notion of the Chriſtian ſcheme, in its juſt extent and purity, than many larger volumes can do.

The doctrines alſo contained in it are the ſubſtantial truths of the goſpel, which tend to purify our hearts and lives, and enlighten our minds with the ſaving knowledge of the Son of God,

Nor does it enter into the ſubtilties of perverſe diſputers, or dwindle into any ſpeculations and metaphyſical ſchemes, which conduce not to edification, but, inſtead of profiting, diſtract the people with queſtions no wiſe uſeful, but in many reſpects extremely prejudicial.

We have alſo always thought there was reaſon to admire the clearneſs and perſpicuity of the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, which, conſidering the myſterious nature and great variety of the truths contained in it, the ſophiſtry of adverſaries, and the ambiguous variable meanings whereby they confound words and things, was a matter of no ſmall difficulty. And it is one excellent quality of this compoſure, that all thoſe intricate and ſcarce-intelligible terms of art brought in by the ſchoolmen, whereby they perplexed divinity, and furniſhed continual occaſion of ſtrife and wrangling, are ſo cautiouſly ſhunned, and ſcarce one of them uſed in our Confeſſion; and, which is the chief excellency of all works of this kind, we hope the ſcriptures ſubjoined to every article, with others to the ſame effect, are convincing evidences of its conformity to the ſacred oracles, and that it is bottomed upon the ſure and infallible foundation of our faith and manners.

All theſe conſiderations, and many more which might be added, are a very ſtrong recommendation of the Weſtminſter Confeſſion to the ſerious and diligent ſtudy of all ranks. It is a ſtupid neglect of God and our own ſouls, for any to continue in ignorance of their duty to him, and the mighty things which their Saviour hath wrought for them; and as it heightens the impiety, ſo it will aggravate the fearful condemnation, of thoſe who love darkneſs, and remain in their blindneſs, in a land of ſo much light, where the glorious goſpel ſhines with ſo bright a luſtre, and the means

of

of knowledge are ſo eaſy and uſeful. It is ſo univerſal a neglect of them that makes men wavering and unſettled in their principles, that expoſes them to cunning deceivers, and every wind of perverſe doctrine; and occaſions that coldneſs of affection and eſteem for the noble bleſſings of the Reformation, and that melancholy indifference whether the friends or enemies of it be ſucceſsful: and hence it is that people ſee ſo little of the divine beauty and harmony of truth, are not animated by a vigorous love and zeal for it, nor are careful to improve its efficacy to the advancing of holineſs.

It is a ſhameful abſurdity, for thoſe who value themſelves upon all the parts of polite education, and endeavour to excel in the amuſements of learning, to be unacquainted with the very ſpeculation of religion, and the fundamental principles of Chriſtianity, which they own with their mouths. It muſt be ſurely a reproach to any member of the church of Scotland, to be ignorant of her public Confeſſion; and methinks it is not much leſs ſcandalous in thoſe that ſeparate from her, to be unacquainted with her real principles, ſince, without this, they can never be able to give a juſt reaſon of their practice, and it will be reaſonably accounted an ignorant ſchiſm.

What hath been hinted concerning the excellency and uſefulneſs of our Confeſſion, will alſo hold good with reſpect to our Larger and Shorter Catechiſms, which are admirably fitted to enlighten the people with ſubſtantial goſpel-truths, and make them knowing and ſerious Chriſtians; and therefore it cannot be reflected upon, without a juſt mixture of grief and reſentment, that any meaſures ſhould be taken which have the leaſt tendency to create a diſeſteem and neglect of theſe compoſures among the people; and particularly, that,

that, contrary to all good order and government, as well as to the edification of Chriſtians, attempts ſhould be made to introduce among inſtructors of youth other catechiſms, which, beſide the errors and obſcurities they may poſſibly be charged with, and their having no claim to any public authority in the church, are for no other valuable quality any wiſe comparable to the Weſtminſter Catechiſms, ſo often ratified by our Aſſemblies.

II. The Confeſſions of the Proteſtant churches were not only deſigned to inſtruct the people in the truth, but to be a ſafeguard againſt the infectious breath of error, of which there is ſo great hazard every where: "Voluimus igitur," ſays the Duke of Wirtemberg, in the preface to the Wirtemberg Confeſſion, "hoc ſcriptum in conſpectum proferre, ut non tam alii cognoſcerent quod doctrinæ genus noſtræ eccleſiæ profiterentur; quam ut noſter populus haberet, quod in hoc ſequereter, et ſciret a quibus erroribus ſibi cavendum eſſet. —— Conſtituimus igitur hoc noſtræ confeſſionis ſcriptum, quod paucis ſummam doctrinæ continet, proponere, ut fontem vere ſalutaris doctrinæ purum atque integrum in eccleſiis noſtræ regionis conſervaremus; et monetam, quæ nobis imaginem cœleſtis Patris refert, a corruptione (quod in nobis eſt) tueremur."

There is nothing that a church ſhould be more ſolicitouſly careful about, than to preſerve her members pure in the faith, and ſafe from thoſe poiſonous errors that abound in the world. This the excellency of truth, the fatal effects of error and diviſion upon all the parts of the Chriſtian life, and the many deceivers who go about, and by various arts endeavour to creep into peoples houſes, and lead captive unwary ſouls, make exceeding

ceeding neceſſary; and for this end, there is nothing will prove more beneficial, than an attentive conſideration of the public ſummaries of our religion, in which the truths oppoſed to the prevailing errors of the time are clearly and forcibly repreſented; by a right uſe whereof the minds of people may be eſtabliſhed in the doctrine which is according to godlineſs, and armed againſt all the machinations of adverſaries.

It is not pretended, that a man ſhould reject a doctrine as falſe and heretical, purely becauſe it is not agreeable to our Confeſſion; ſince Chriſtians are to try the ſpirits by the infallible teſt of the holy ſcriptures, and not by the determination of human compoſures. But as, on other accounts, ſuch a ſummary of the Chriſtian religion, framed and publiſhed by the authority of the church, may be very uſeful to preſerve the minds of the people from the contagion of error; ſo it ſhould at leaſt have this effect, to make them cautious of receiving an opinion contrary to the public ſtandard of a church whereof they are members, and which they think in general ſo agreeable to the word of God. This may create in them a ſuſpicion, that the perſons who would draw them over to thoſe opinions are cunning ſeducers who creep into peoples houſes; and thereby make them juſtly jealous of what they ſay and do, and put them upon examining, with the greater diligence, the pretenſions of ſuch perſons, by the holy ſcriptures, and a careful uſe of all the means for underſtanding them; and were our Confeſſion duly improved for this purpoſe, we, who are perſuaded of its purity and excellency, cannot but think, that it would be a very ſucceſsful inſtrument of maintaining the ſincerity and uncorruptedneſs of the *truth as it is in Jeſus*.

The people are expoſed to a great many ſnares, which

which ought to engage them to a diligent uſe of all means whereby they may avoid them. The Papiſts, and other enemies of our holy religion, are ſkilful in all the deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs, and employ very miſchievous, and frequently imperceptible methods of corrupting the faith of the Reformation. They can put on ſheeps clothing, and, even under the maſk of higher pretenſions than their neighbours to a zeal for truth, and of elevating the doctrine they teach to a greater degree of purity, impoſe upon the credulous, and pervert weak minds. The natural levity and fickleneſs of men, eſpecially the more ignorant ſort, expoſe them a ready prey to ſeducers. The fondneſs that people have to diſtinguiſh themſelves from others adds to the temptation. Pride, ſelf-conceit, and a love of popular applauſe, are fruitful of errors, and put many upon forming parties, and leading the people aſtray. The luſts of our hearts, and the extreme inclination we have to reconcile our intereſts and pleaſures with our duty, and a diſeſteem of the law of God, with a pretended regard to his grace, make all looſe ſchemes, and particularly Antinomian doctrines, very infectious, and procure too favourable a reception to opinions, books, and pamphlets, which have a tendency that way; and the ſuperior influence which a form of godlineſs hath with the generality beyond the power of it, will, with ſuch perſons, render notions which have that form more popular than the ſubſtantial truths of the doctrine which is in reality according to godlineſs. And all theſe ſnares have become much more dangerous by that ſtupid neglect of Chriſtian knowledge, and ſhameful ignorance, which are to be found with a great number.

Were the means of knowledge which God affords with ſo diſtinguiſhing advantages to this church,

church, duly improved, and particularly by a diligent uſe of our Confeſſion and Catechiſms, the minds of people would be fortified and eſtabliſhed; thoſe ignorant ſchiſmatics who rove about the country, would not find ſo many blind enough to follow them; nor would new and unſcriptural notions of any kind meet with ſo favourable a reception; and the lurking poiſon, and dangerous tendency, of any books ſpread through the country, would be ſooner diſcovered, and eaſier ſhunned.

WE are ſorry that there ſhould be occaſion to mention one performance of this kind, which hath been lately reprinted, and propagated with ſo much induſtry; though one would have thought, that the many valuable and approved practical pieces which the church enjoys might have rendered it needleſs, as ſome things contained therein ſeemed to make it no wiſe expedient. The reader will eaſily perceive, that it is THE MARROW OF MODERN DIVINITY which is hinted at.

It would be wandering away from the deſign of this compoſure, to enter upon an examination of any particular book; and, therefore, we ſhall only obſerve in general, that beſide the inaccuracies in reaſoning, and the obſcurities and ambiguities which render that book very unfit for the common people, and are apt to perplex and confound them, there are in it at leaſt ſeveral expreſſions extremely indecent, and which are enough to ſtrike with horror thoſe who retain that veneration and honour for the holy law of God, which its own incomparable excellency, and the authority and awe of the great legiſlator, give it a claim to, and, one would think, ſhould be enough to guard it againſt the rude, I had almoſt ſaid profane, treatment which it ſometimes meets with.

with. There are in that book many paſſages, which, if they do not diſſolve the obligation to obedience, and openly allow to Chriſtians a licentious liberty, yet mightily weaken its force and efficacy, tend to cool the zeal and vigour of Chriſtians in the ſtudy of holineſs, and to give them mean and languiſhing thoughts of it, as of no great importance or neceſſity in Chriſtianity. There are ſeveral parts of it which the corruptions of mankind will make an engine of, to ſtifle the voice of the divine law, and of the grace of God too, *teaching us to deny all ungodlineſs*; and to ſilence the conviction of their conſciences, they will thence take occaſion to flatter themſelves with the fond hopes that they may be juſtified, while they continue to produce little of the fruits of righteouſneſs, and in their practice neglect or vilify the works of the law. The very definition of faith given by it ſeems, to ſubtilize that great inſtrument of our juſtification, and that noble principle of a purified heart and life, into an airy and ineffectual ſpeculation, which a preſumptuous ſinner may perſuade himſelf he hath attained to, and ſo lull his ſoul into a fatal ſecurity. It ſeems to lead people into a way of meaſuring their ſtate with reſpect to God and religion, by different teſts from thoſe which the ſcriptures afford us, and to divert them from trying the ſincerity of their faith by the genuine marks of it, and the characters we are leaſt liable to be deceived by, the producing much fruit, the ſanctifying our hearts, and purifying our lives, and governing our paſſions.

When holineſs is the moſt glorious and amiable excellency of the divine nature that is chiefly propoſed to our delight and our imitation; when the neceſſity, beauty, and perfection of it, are ſo warmly urged home upon us in the word of God,

and it is the great ſubject of all the ſermons pronounced by the unerring prophet of the church; when it is the diſtinguiſhing character of the Meſſiah's ſubjects, that they are a *holy nation*, and it is the noble deſign of all the mighty acts of a Saviour's love, and the powers of his death, to ſave us from our ſins, and from a vain converſation, "He gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem "us from all iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a "peculiar people, zealous of good works *;" when it is the apoſtolical definition of religion, That "pure religion and undefiled before God "and the Father, is this, To viſit the fatherleſs "and widows in their affliction, and to keep "himſelf unſpotted from the world †;" and that holineſs is the great end of all the goſpel ordinances and graces, even of faith itſelf, the myſtery whereof we muſt hold in a pure conſcience ‡, and which God makes uſe of to purify our hearts ‖; when, for this purpoſe, the hope of the glorious appearance of our Saviour is given us, "that we "may purify ourſelves, even as he is pure **;" when, as might be proved, it is the tendency of all the doctrines of grace and ſalvation, of the righteouſneſs and ſatisfaction of the Son of God, and of our juſtification and redemption by his blood, to exalt and enforce holineſs; and when the work and influences of the Spirit of Chriſt are to advance it to perfection, "He loved his "church, and gave himſelf for it; that he might "ſanctify and cleanſe it with the waſhing of wa-"ter, by the word, that he might preſent it to "himſelf a glorious church, not having ſpot or "wrinkle, or any ſuch thing; but that it ſhould "be holy, and without blemiſh ††;" and it is the

* Tit. ii. 14. † James i. 27. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 9.
‖ Acts xv. 9. ** 1 John iii. 3. †† Eph. v. 25. 26. 27.

honour of our exalted Redeemer, that "he is "able to keep his people from falling, and to "preſent them faultleſs before the preſence of his "glory with exceeding joy *," that they may ever inhabit that place wherein dwelleth everlaſting righteouſneſs; in a word, when it is the excellency and the glory of the grace of God, and of juſtifying faith, that they are ſo admirably calculated to promote holineſs; when it is the higheſt injury and affront to turn them into licentiouſneſs, the greateſt ſervice to the enemies of the grace of God, and the moſt plauſible handle that can be afforded to Pealgians to improve them that way; it is a ſurpriſing and an affecting conſideration, that any ſchemes and pamphlets which have at leaſt ſome appearances of theſe evils, ſhould be fondly entertained by ſincere Chriſtians, and that the very firſt beginnings of them do not meet with a juſter reception.

Nor will ſome diſtinctions that are made, which might perhaps be eaſier refuted if their meaning were underſtood, juſtify the paſſages hinted at, or remedy their miſchievous conſequences. They may pleaſe the men that make them; but will theſe ſubtilties impreſs the minds of the people? will they ſecure their corruptions from taking ſo plauſible occaſion of gratifying them? will they prevent ſelf love, and ſelf conceit, the natural inclination we have to flatter ourſelves, and that woful averſion to true holineſs which poſſeſſes the minds of men, from making uſe of theſe doctrines to lull their ſouls into a ſecure dependence upon a ſpeculative religion, and a dead faith that is without works? No: practical errors are, of all others, the moſt contagious. They have a ſteady friend in every man's breaſt: his heart is upon

* Jud. 24.

their

their ſide; and the wounds given by any notions that may have a tendency that way, are too deep and poiſonous to be cured by metaphyſics.

The good things that may be found in that or other ſuch writings, the piety of their authors, or the worth of the perſons who recommend them, only render ſuch compoſures more dangerous; and whatever value or eſteem we may ſtill preſerve for theſe learned and worthy miniſters, their judgement is not to be a rule to Chriſtians, nor will their authority make a thing good that is in itſelf hurtful. It is a great advantage to all errors when mens perſons are held in admiration. It has often been the practice of ſuch as promote them, to pretend an extraordinary zeal for ſome truths, and particularly the grace of God; as the groſſeſt Antinomians do, and as no doubt thoſe did mentioned by Jude, who "turned it into laſciviouſ-"neſs *." "I beſeech you, brethren, mark "them which cauſe diviſions and offences, con-"trary to the doctrine which ye have learned, "and avoid them. For they that are ſuch, ſerve "not our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, but their own bel-"ly; and BY GOOD WORDS AND FAIR "SPEECHES deceive the hearts of the ſimple †;" though we are more charitable to the authors of ſuch writings as we are now ſpeaking of, than to deſign an application of theſe ſcriptures to them.

To conclude, We are ſorry that the contents of the book ſhould give occaſion to make an obſervation on the title of it, which would not otherwiſe have been worth noticing, that it is indeed MODERN DIVINITY, more modern than the doctrine of Chriſt and his apoſtles, and than that "grace of God which bringeth ſalvation, and "hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that de-

* Jude 4. † Rom. xvi. 17. 18.

" nying ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, we ſhould " live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this " preſent world *."

Inſtead of ſome books of this ſort, were our Confeſſion of Faith and Catechiſms, particularly the Larger Catechiſm, recommended to the people, and diligently peruſed by them, and compared with the holy ſcriptures, it would be an excellent mean of preſerving them ſtedfaſt in the truth, that they might hold *the myſtery of faith in a pure conſcience*, and go aſide neither to the right hand nor to the left; and we might be helped to conform ourſelves to that remarkable inſtruction of Paul to Titus, and to avoid ſuch queſtions as are there ſpoken of: " This is a faithful ſaying, and " theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, " that they which have believed in God, might " be careful to maintain good works: theſe " things are good and profitable unto men. But " avoid fooliſh queſtions, and genealogies, and " contentions, and ſtrivings about the LAW; " for they are unprofitable and vain †."

III. A third deſign of Confeſſions belonging to this claſs was, that the churches might tranſmit their teſtimony to the truth unto their lateſt poſterity, and furniſh their children with an argument to perſevere in the ſame doctrine, and an encouragement to animate them amidſt the greateſt dangers and difficulties. To this purpoſe the Elector Palatine expreſſeth himſelf in a very pious and affecting ſtrain. For this end, he ſays, he left behind him that confeſſion of his faith, " Ut " chariſſimi mei liberi tanto redderentur alacrio- " res et animoſiores, ad conſtanter quoque perſe- " verandum in hac mea Chriſtiana fide; nec ſe

* Tit. ii. 11. 12. † Tit. iii. 8. 9.

" ullis

" ullis inſultibus, et turbulentis periculorum pro-
" cellis ac tempeſtatibus, quarum ego, DEO ſit
" gratia, hactenus plurimas graviſſimaſque, toto
" meæ gubernationis curriculo, auxiliante DEO
" ſuſtinui ac ſuperavi, ab hac fide abduci pateren-
" tur, aut in ſuæ vocationis officio, et veræ hujus,
" Chriſtianæque religionis propagatione, remiſ-
" ſiores, timidiores, aut negligentiores efficeren-
" tur: quemadmodum ipſe quoque, quod ad me
" privatim attinet, nihilo ſecius nec ſegnius quam
" hactenus feci, in hac ipſa, quam agnoſco et
" profiteor veritate, fretus gratia et auxilio DEI
" omnipotentis, ad extremum uſque vitæ meæ
" halitum perſiſtere ac perdurare, certo decrevi."

Our Confeſſions of Faith are in a peculiar manner uſeful for this end, and may be in an uncommon degree improved by the members of the church of Scotland, for engaging them to a vigorous zeal for thoſe bleſſings tranſmitted to us by our fathers, and a ſtedfaſt adherence to the purity of the Chriſtian doctrine. Let us call to mind, that what we now profeſs is the faith of the Reformation, which our fathers embraced when their hearts were warmeſt with the love of God and of truth, and the ſpirit of that bleſſed change exerted itſelf with the moſt unconſtrained and diſintereſted efficacy. May that light which then broke out from amidſt the clouds and darkneſs of Popery, ſtill irradiate our ſouls, and be received with the ſame impartiality and chearfulneſs which it then met with! Let us remember their labours for the truth, their unwearied conſtancy and unſhaken fortitude in maintaining and propagating it. Let us follow ſo noble an example, and bluſh at the thoughts of ever deſerting theſe truths, looking upon their ruins or their hazards with indifferency, or an inglorious neutrality, and

ſuffering them, through our faults, to be loſt to poſterity.

What mighty things hath God done to preſerve our Reformation to us in its primitive extent and vigour! and what a delightful mixture of love and power hath adorned the working of his uncontrouled providence in our behalf! How many ſchemes of politicians hath he blown up! What contrivances of ambitious and tyrannical princes, who hated the ſimplicity of our worſhip, and the liberty of our principles, hath he defeated! What ſtorms of perſecution and diviſion too hath he calmed! He ſupported this church, while toſſed by thoſe furious tempeſts, and purſued with the unrelenting malice and perfidy of apoſtates and deſerters; and at length, when on the brink of ruin, he brought us to the deſired haven.

If it had not been the Lord who was on our ſide, when men roſe up againſt us, then they had ſwallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled againſt us; then the waters had overwhelmed us; the ſtream had gone over our ſoul. Bleſſed be the Lord, who hath not given us a prey to their teeth! Now what can we render to the Lord for all his benefits, that will prove ſo acceptable a ſacrifice to him, as a high value, zealous love, and ſtedfaſt adherence to theſe precious truths of our Reformation, together with a conſtant care to adorn our profeſſion of them by the beauties of holineſs?

Theſe are alſo the ſame truths that were with ſo much bravery and conſtancy maintained in the reign of blood and perſecution, that many now living once groaned under, which many gave a teſtimony to by their ſufferings, and by their deaths, and were not prevailed upon to abandon by the allurements and terrors of this world. Seeing, therefore, we are compaſſed with ſo great a cloud of witneſſes,

witneſſes, let us run the ſame race with as much patience and conſtancy.

Among all polite nations, the great actions of their progenitors were accounted a powerful motive with poſterity to purſue the ſame paths of glory, and to be invigorated by their example. The *imagines majorum* were a ſource of courage and intrepidity to the Roman youth, and preſented to them, in the ſtrongeſt light, both arguments to perſuade and inflame them, and encouragements to animate and ſupport them. Let us in the ſame manner improve the zeal and fortitude of ſo many ſaints and martyrs, who held faſt the profeſſion of their faith without wavering, and continued faithful to the death. When the goodneſs of our merciful God hath placed this church in ſo happy circumſtances, and hath delivered it from its enemies, we ſhould now be the more active and diligent to get our ſouls impreſſed with the love of truth, to make advances in the knowledge of Chriſtianity, to attain a ſpiritual ſight of the divine beauties and excellencies of our holy faith, that may charm all our affections, and to have the rays of truth daily enlightening our minds, and warming our hearts; and thus we ſhall both make a wiſe uſe of our preſent felicity, and arm ourſelves with fidelity, courage, and conſtancy, if ever divine Providence ſhould ſuffer thoſe ſtorms and clouds again to gather, which were ſo wonderfully ſcattered by the late glorious and happy Revolution.

And, in the laſt place, with the example of our fathers, let us call to mind the peculiar obligations this church is under to remain ſtedfaſt in this doctrine, ſince the Weſtminſter Confeſſion contains the ſame truths which were profeſſed in our Reformation Confeſſion, to which this nation were ſolemnly bound by their oath to God in the National

National Covenant, that glorious tranſaction, which, however it may be derided and vilified, will always be reckoned the diſtinguiſhing honour of our country by all thoſe who know, that true religion is the greateſt bleſſing to a people; and that it is their glory to make profeſſion of it; which glory is heightened, and becomes more illuſtrious, in proportion to the ſolemnity, the extent, and the zeal, of ſuch a profeſſion.

Never, we believe, was there a kingdom, ſince that of the Jews, that with ſo much ſolemnity did, in a public national capacity, King, Lords, and Commons, &c. conſenting, own their belief of the truth as it is in Jeſus, and engage to a ſteady immoveable adherence to its intereſts, as our church did by the National Covenant, when it did, before the world, angels, and men, avouch the Lord for its God, and devote itſelf to his ſervice: ſo that to us, in ſo far, what is ſaid of Iſrael may be applied beyond other countries: "Thou art "a holy people unto the Lord thy God: The "Lord thy God hath choſen thee to be a ſpecial "people to himſelf, above all people that are up-"on the face of the earth *." And in the day that our fathers ſwore, as in that covenant, to God, (and the ſame thing will hold with reſpect unto us, while we continue in the ſame doctrine, and approve of their choice), this church might have been addreſſed in the words of Moſes to Iſrael, Deut. xxvi. 17. "Thou haſt avouched the "Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in "his ways, and to keep his ſtatutes, and his com-"mandments, and his judgements, and to hear-"ken unto his voice: And the Lord hath a-"vouched thee this day to be his peculiar people." And being thus dignified with the advantages of

* Deut. vii. 6.

the Jewiſh church, we may expect the promiſed bleſſings, or fear the threatened ruin, according as we remain ſtedfaſt in the ways of truth and holineſs. All that hath been ſpoken will aggravate the ſhame and ſin of our apoſtaſy, and heighten the puniſhment due to perfidious or cowardly deſerters. But if we remain faithful in the covenant of God, retain the uncorrupted doctrine according to godlineſs, and both believe and obey it, we have reaſon to hope, that it may ever be ſaid of this church, "Happy art thou, O ISRAEL: "who is like unto thee, O people ſaved by the "Lord, the ſhield of thy help, and who is the "ſword of thy excellency! and thine enemies ſhall "be found liars unto thee, and thou ſhalt tread "upon their high places *."

IV. THE laſt uſe of Confeſſions was, that they might be ſubſervient to the hiſtory of the church, by tranſmitting unto poſterity an authentic and impartial account of the doctrines embraced by the ſeveral churches. The Saxon churches, in the preface to their Confeſſion, give this reaſon for their publiſhing it: "Neceſſe eſt nos etiam ad po-"ſteros relinquere publica teſtimonia, digna fide, "oppoſita falſis criminationibus; ne poſteritas de "nobis judicet; et ut aliqui his noſtris teſtimo-"niis commonefacti, veritatem inquirant, et in "veris ſententiis confirmentur." How uſeful and neceſſary Confeſſions, and particularly our own, are for this purpoſe, hath been ſufficiently manifeſted in the firſt part of this work, when we ſhewed, that it is by ſuch compoſures alone that we can be enabled to form the juſteſt and moſt impartial notions of the doctrine, worſhip, and government, of any church.

* Deut. xxxiii. 29.

V. THAT

V. THAT we may put an end to this preface, it remains now only, that we return a very ſhort anſwer to two particular objections which are brought againſt our church with relation to her Confeſſion, and in the mouths of ſome perſons make a great deal of noiſe.

The firſt ariſes from the uſe which, it is alledged, the church of Scotland makes of her Confeſſion in the adminiſtration of the ſacrament of baptiſm. It may ſeem almoſt needleſs to take notice of the expreſſions of an author formerly mentioned, becauſe what is there ſaid will appear at firſt view plainly ridiculous to any body who is tolerably acquainted with our practice or principles; which it is certain every man ought to be who pretends to condemn and expoſe them. The thing hinted at is, Sir Richard Steil's dedication to the Pope of the *Account of the ſtate of the Romiſh religion*, publiſhed by him; where, ſpeaking of Scotland, p. 12. he ſays, "Infants are baptized "there, not only into the name of the Father, "Son, and Holy Ghoſt, but into the pure doctrine "profeſſed and ſettled by the church of Scotland." Were either the practice of our church, or what is meant by being baptized in the name of the Father, &c. underſtood, there would have been no place found for this reflection; nor is there any thing with us as to this matter in general, but what is a neceſſary conſequence of the thing itſelf, and the conſtant practice of Chriſtians. Before a perſon be received into the church by baptiſm, it is a maxim of common ſenſe, That he ſhould make a profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith; or, in the caſe of infants, that the parent ſhould do it, and engage to educate them in the knowledge of that religion. A profeſſion of faith and repentance was always made at baptiſm. Thus it is ſaid of John, that "the people were baptized of him in Jor-

"dan,

" dan, CONFESSING THEIR SINS *. Our Saviour, when he gives that ſolemn commiſſion to his apoſtles, Matth. xxviii. 19. " To baptize " all nations in the name of the Father, and of " the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt," adds, " Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever " I have commanded you;" and is it to be doubted, but the perſon to be baptized was to profeſs his obedience to all theſe things? We have a remarkable illuſtration of this matter in the inſtance of the Ethiopian eunuch, where Philip required an acknowledgement of his faith as a neceſſary condition of his being baptized; and the eunuch gave it accordingly. " And the eunuch " ſaid, See, here is water, what doth hinder me " to be baptized? And Philip ſaid, If thou be- " lieveſt with all thine heart, thou mayeſt. And " he anſwered, I believe that Jeſus Chriſt is the " Son of God †." And it is well known how plain and full the practice of the primitive Chriſtians was in this matter.

The only plauſible objection then is, that our church too much confines the terms of Chriſtian communion, and incroaches upon the liberties of the people; that all have a right to baptiſm who maintain the fundamentals of religion, which many do who differ from us in ſeveral articles of faith; that therefore, to oblige parents who preſent their children to be baptized, either to profeſs their own belief of all the articles of our Confeſſion, or to educate their children in the faith of them, is to eſtabliſh other bounds of Chriſtian communion than the great author of our religion hath done, and to exclude many from the church who may be his ſincere followers, and ought to be received into it.

* Matth. iii. 6. † Acts viii. 36. 37.

In

In anſwer to this, we ſhall juſt mention theſe three things.

Firſt, That, in ſo far as is known to us, there is no act of Aſſembly, nor even of any inferior church-judicature, eſtabliſhing the Confeſſion of Faith a term of Chriſtian communion, and appointing miniſters to require an aſſent thereto from Chriſtian parents, in order to their being admitted to all the privileges of church-communion, and particularly the baptiſm of their children; and therefore there does not ſeem to be place for the foundation of the objection.

It is true, that, according to the principles laid down and maintained in this treatiſe, a plain and direct acknowledgement of the eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity, may be juſtly required by any church of all that would lay claim to baptiſm, and the fellowſhip of Chriſtians. But our church hath acted ſo wiſe and cautious a part, as never to have pretended to condeſcend upon theſe preciſe articles which ſhould be declared fundamental and neceſſary maxims of our religion, and to pitch upon all theſe doctrines, the belief of which is indiſpenſably neceſſary in a ſincere Chriſtian, and without which a man cannot poſſibly be a member of the body of Chriſt; ſince that were an attempt of great difficulty, and might be liable to much greater inconveniencies than the leaving it uneſſayed.

2*dly*, It muſt indeed be acknowledged, that, according to the general practice which hath prevailed in the church, when the ſacrament of baptiſm is adminiſtered, the parent, or the ſponſor, whoever he be, is engaged to educate the child in the principles of the true Reformed Chriſtian religion, as contained in the holy ſcriptures; whereof, as is told them, there is an excellent ſummary in our Confeſſion of Faith and Catechiſms. Nor

ſhall we deny but that this may be conſtructed an obligation on the parent to train up his child in the doctrines of the Weſtminſter Confeſſion, and conſequently a declaration, that he believes theſe doctrines himſelf. But we hope this cannot be called the ſmalleſt impoſition upon a perſon who heartily embraces all theſe doctrines, and not only is free from any ſcruple as to the articles of our ſtandard, but deſires to embrace that opportunity of publicly owning, before all the church, his firm belief and cordial acceptation of theſe articles as the truths of Jeſus, and the doctrines of that pure faith which he receives with his heart, and acknowledges with the mouth. Surely it were a very unreaſonable hardſhip, to refuſe that perſon an opportunity every way ſo fit for it, of making a profeſſion of the faith of the goſpel, as it appears to him in its greateſt light and purity. Now it is very juſtly ſuppoſed, that all perſons who know the common practice of the church, and yet move no objections, are of this diſpoſition, and have theſe inclinations.

In the third place, As there is no eſtabliſhed rule, nor any act of aſſembly, confining the benefits of baptiſm to the belief of the ſeveral articles of our Confeſſion, and excluding from a participation of this ordinance all perſons who may in ſome things differ from us; ſo there was no ground in fact ever given to a perſon to complain of an arbitrary impoſition upon him in this reſpect; nor can any man, ſo far as we know, alledge, that he acquainted a miniſter that he had ſcruples as to ſome articles of our Confeſſion, or was of a contrary opinion to them, and therefore that he could neither profeſs his own belief of them, nor engage to educate his child in them, and was thereupon denied acceſs to this ſacrament. On the other hand, there have been ſe-

veral inſtances of perſons, who, upon their deſire, were gratified in this particular; while none had ever reaſon to complain of a refuſal. From which conſideration, it is hoped, the groundleſsneſs of the clamour raiſed by our enemies will evidently appear.

VI. THERE is only one thing farther to be noticed, and truly it is ſo trifling, that it would merit no regard, did not our adverſaries, with a great deal of confidence, boaſt of it, namely, the flat contradiction which they alledge there is betwixt the principles which we now fall in with concerning civil government, together with the conduct of this church ſince the Revolution, and theſe words of the 23d chapter of the Confeſſion of Faith, *Of the civil magiſtrate*, § 4. "Infidelity or difference "in religion doth not make void the magiſtrate's "juſt and legal authority, nor free the people "from their due obedience to him."

This indeed hath been the principle of our, and I believe of all other churches. Nor could they maintain the contrary, without unhinging all government in Heathen, Mahometan, and Popiſh countries, which were very abſurd, and without denying the ſubmiſſion and obedience to the Roman Cæſars, which Chriſt and his apoſtles paid them. But this can never, in the ſmalleſt degree, be inconſiſtent with our having diſclaimed all allegiance, &c. to the abdicated, or, in the ſtyle of our acts of parliament, the forfeited King James, and, ſince his death, to the Pretender unto the Britiſh crown; except it can be proved, that we acknowledge, that the Pretender hath a juſt and legal authority of the ſupreme magiſtrate, which, becauſe of his infidelity, we make void. This were indeed to contradict the alledged articles of the

the Weſtminſter Confeſſion. But ſince we are perſuaded, that he hath no right or title whatſoever, that he is not a magiſtrate, and hath no manner of authority in theſe iſlands, the people whereof owe him not the leaſt obedience, it may be alledged, that we injure him; but there is not the ſmalleſt colour for charging us with contradicting the principles of our own Confeſſion, when we utterly renounce and diſclaim his imaginary kingſhip.

It is not ſimply becauſe he is a Papiſt, that we pay no allegiance to that pretended king, but becauſe he hath now no right to the Britiſh throne, whatever be his religion; any title which otherwiſe he might have had, being vacated and annulled by thoſe who, according to our principles, had an undoubted power to limit the ſucceſſion of the crown, as appeared neceſſary for the public good; as all the plea which the late King James could have made for himſelf and his poſterity, was entirely deſtroyed by his tyrannical invaſion of the fundamental laws and conſtitutions of government, whereby he was expoſed to a juſt and neceſſary forfeiture.

Wherefore, though no doubt his embracing that abominable idolatry, and being ſo deeply impreſſed with the cruel and impious maxims of that falſe and bloody religion, gives us a higher reliſh of the infinite goodneſs of a merciful God, in eſtabliſhing upon the throne our preſent excellent Sovereign King George, and inſpires with a great ardour our ſincere wiſhes for the ſtability and glory of his reign; ſhows us, in a more ſhining light, the bleſſings of the Proteſtant ſucceſſion in his illuſtrious family; and increaſes our horror at the diſmal proſpect of things, if ever an avenging God ſhould ſend the Pretender to be a ſcourge unto

theſe nations: yet we do not change our principles, by pretending that his infidelity makes void his juſt and legal authority; for to us there does not appear ſo much as the leaſt ſhadow of any authority which that perſon can lay claim to in Britain, but very plain demonſtrations of the contrary.

We have now given an account of all the different uſes and purpoſes of Confeſſions of Faith, which we thought of any importance; have endeavoured to illuſtrate, explain, and vindicate them, and to conſider all the material objections which we could imagine might be brought againſt them; and ſo we have finiſhed all that was at firſt propoſed in this eſſay.

FINIS.

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